



PATTERNS

56th EDITION

IN MEMORIAM

TWANA PINSKEY



We mourn the passing of Twana Pinskey, who was born on May 17, 1959, and passed away on Saturday, September 21, 2013. Twana's writings and visual artwork appeared in *Patterns* over many years, from the 50th through the 54th editions. We honor her memory.

PREFACE 56TH EDITION

WHAT IS *PATTERNS*?

Patterns magazine is St. Clair County Community College’s literary and arts publication. Published annually since 1959, *Patterns* showcases the best writing and visual artwork produced by SC4 students each year. While organization and oversight of the publication has always been handled by SC4 faculty and staff, over the years we have increasingly involved students in every aspect of the publication; from producing its content, to editing, to the creative layout and design work, our students have taken on a major role in creating each issue of the magazine.

THE *PATTERNS* WRITING AND ART COMPETITION

Since its inception, *Patterns* has featured student writing and artworks selected as the results of a competition conducted in the fall of the year. Panels of volunteer judges in the faculty of English and Fine Arts determine which works will be published. Beginning with the initiation of the *Patterns* Visiting Artists Forum (see below), professional writers from outside the college have selected the top prize winners in poetry, fiction and essay writing.

VISITING ARTISTS FORUM

In the year 2000, SC4 professor Jim Frank applied for a grant to fund the first *Patterns* Visiting Artists Forum, a program that invited professional writers of national and international repute to act as judges for the *Patterns* competition and to come to our campus in April to conduct writing workshops, meet with students, faculty, staff and community members, and to give public readings of their own work. Professor Frank’s initiative has continued, and now for the fifteenth year we have been privileged to host poets, novelists, playwrights, essayists and visual artists of the highest caliber—including winners of such honors as the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

56TH EDITION OF *PATTERNS*

In recent years, SC4 has seen a very noticeable increase in the number of veterans, especially of Iraq and Afghanistan, coming through our doors. Inspired by many of these veterans who have, through writing or other forms of artistic expression, shared with us their insights and experiences, the editors of *Patterns* have sought out for this year’s Visiting Artists Forum three combat veterans whose work has been deeply informed by their experience in war.

VISITING ARTIST/AUTHORS

RICHARD CASPER

Visiting Artist Forum Judge, Visual Arts

Richard Casper is a veteran of the U.S. Marines Corps and an artist. His role as a veteran of the Iraq War has influenced his work with ceramics and photography. He tells tales of war through his ceramic sculptures and helps audiences appreciate and understand the seriousness of war. His work has been featured in two different shows at the Art Institute of Chicago and will be displayed in the office of the President of the Institute. He has been interviewed to be an emissary of the Institute. He is a graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago. He lives in Chicago.

SEAN DAVIS

Visiting Artist Forum Judge, Short Stories and Essays

Sean Davis is a Purple Heart recipient who served in the army infantry for 14 years with numerous deployments including a revolution, a war and three humanitarian missions. He left the military to return to school and earn a bachelor’s in English from Portland State University and a master’s in fiction from Pacific University. His first book, *Motivation and Toleration*, was published in 2004. His memoir, *The Wax Bullet War*, will be published in May 2014, and recounts his service in Iraq and during the Hurricane Katrina clean up. He also has contributed to and edited an anthology by veterans titled *Rough Men Stand Ready*. He is a frequent contributor to *Nailed Magazine* and *The Good Men Project*. He is the editor of *Hubris Press* and *Split Infinitive* and a consulting editor at the *Silk Road Review*. His work has been featured in *The Willamette Week* and the *Oregonian*. He also is a painter, and recently, has been writing one act plays and making short films. He lives in Portland.

BRIAN TURNER

Visiting Artist Forum Judge, Poetry

Brian Turner is a veteran of the Iraq War and a poet. He is the author of two collections of poetry – *Here, Bullet* and *Phantom Noise*. *Here, Bullet* is a *New York Times* “Editor’s Choice” selection and has won numerous awards, including the 2005 Beatrice Hawley Award and the 2007 Poets Prize. A 2009-10 Amy Lowell Traveling Poetry Scholar, Turner also has been awarded a 2009 USA Hillcrest Fellowship, an NEA Fellowship and a Lannan Literary Fellowship. His work has been published in *Poetry Daily*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Georgia Review* and others. He teaches at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village, Nevada.

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SC4 Friends of the Arts is a committed group of businesses, community members and SC4 faculty and staff, that support the arts at SC4, including music, theatre, creative writing and visual arts. They are building community through the arts.

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY FRIENDS OF THE ARTS INCLUDE:

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- Free Noon and Night Concert Series, including free music workshops
- Free Twilight Concert Series
- Special musical performances
- Student, alumni and faculty art exhibitions
- Theatrical productions with the SC4 Players
- *Patterns* magazine
- Poetry readings
- Literary workshops

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

AWARDED

LITERARY

Eleanor Mathews Award	Ali Carr	Page 12
-----------------------	----------	---------

POETRY

AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
Blanche Redman Award	Ali Carr	Page 13
First Place	Lindsey Gofton	Page 14
Second Place	Lindsey Gofton	Page 15

SHORT STORY

AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
Richard Colwell Award	Elizabeth Mahlstedt	Page 16–17
First Place	Jennifer Noble	Page 18–19
Second Place	Davon Morris	Page 20–21

ESSAY

AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
Kathleen Nickerson Award	Synthia Clemons	Page 22–23
First Place	Gerald Crowe	Page 24–25
Second Place	Jillian Helsom	Page 26–27

ART

ARTIST	TITLE	PAGE
Patrick Bourke Award	Jeremy Wilson	Page 30
First Place	Shelby Castillo	Page 31
Second Place	Craig DesJardins	Page 32
Third Place	Lauren Palmateer	Page 33

SELECTION OF MERIT

ART

ARTIST	TITLE	PAGE
Ceramics	Savevone Sonsynath	Page 36
Ceramics	Betsy Vollmar	Page 37
Drawing	Shelby Castillo	Page 38
Drawing	Markus Coleman	Page 39
Photography	Jonathan T. Ferriell	Page 40

SELECTION OF MERIT (CONT.)

ART

ARTIST	TITLE	PAGE
Drawing	Shelby Castillo	Page 41
Linocut	Clarissa Karling	Page 42
Ceramics	Whitney Ward	Page 43
Photography	Clarissa Spangler	Page 44
Photography	Clarissa Spangler	Page 45
Collage	Bryan Billiet	Page 46
Multimedia	Bryan Billiet	Page 46
Acrylic Paint	Bryan Billiet	Page 47
Heat Sensitive Paper/Silk	Bryan Billiet	Page 47
Foamcore with Origami	Bryan Billiet	Page 48
Digital Media	Brad Stone	Page 49
Digital Media	Kassandra Piotrowski	Page 50
Digital Media	Anthony Petit	Page 50
Digital Media	Tammy Tober	Page 51
Digital Media	Meghan Barriger	Page 52
Digital Media	Meghan Barriger	Page 52
Digital Media, Multi	Meghan Barriger	Page 53
Digital Media, Multi	Meghan Barriger	Page 54
Digital Media, Multi	Meghan Barriger	Page 55
Digital Media,Multi	Sheryl Penzien	Page 56
Digital Media,Multi	Sheryl Penzien	Page 57
Digital Media	Craig DesJardins	Page 58
Digital Media	Sheryl Penzien	Page 58
Digital Media	Jeremy Wilson	Page 59

LITERARY

AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
Essay	Gerard Crowe	Page 62–63
Essay	Synthia Clemons	Page 64
Poetry	David Bercel	Page 65
Poetry	Shelby Stoddard	Page 66
Poetry	Katie Flenna	Page 67
Poetry	Lindsey Gofton	Page 68
Poetry	Brittany Hoist	Page 69
Poetry	Shelby Stoddard	Page 70
Short Stories	Jennifer Noble	Page 71–72
Short Stories	Jennifer Noble	Page 73–74
Short Stories	Ali Carr	Page 75–78
Short Stories	Thomas Hickman	Page 79

**AWARDED
LITERARY**

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

ALI CARR



For over thirty years, the English faculty of SC4 has awarded the Eleanor Mathews Award for “outstanding creativity, technical skill, and individual style” to recognize student writers for overall achievement in creative writing. Traditionally the Mathews Award has been given to a deserving student who has had work published in *Patterns* in multiple genres and/or over a number of years. This year’s Mathews Award goes to Ali Carr for her outstanding work in fiction and poetry published in the 56th edition.

This year’s Blanche Redman Award in poetry goes to the author of the poem, “Fear.” What impresses me most is the author’s continual searching within the poem for correlations in the natural world in ways that mirror the internal mechanics of fear. Musically, the lineation matches the “flapping” nature of the psychology at work while still allowing a diminishment , a slowing to completion, at the end.
— Brian Turner

Like a deaf bat
Flapping around in the dark,
Left behind,
Alone and lost,
Unable to get out of
The cave he dwells in;
A white rabbit,
Who’s lost the use of his back legs
And can no longer run
Back to his hole.
Head under water,
Vision lost,
My limbs flail,
Feet no longer
Touching the sand,
Land disappears as I’m
Carried away
By the current,
And away from
Everyone else.



FEAR Ali Carr

Blanche Redman Award — Poetry

Ice drapes the land,
This frost is her home.
Wrapped in wool, she smiles,
The cold is comfort.
Everyone is poor,
Therefore she is poor,
Her tattered clothes frayed.
She sits behind the elders,
Happy to laugh along,
Still shadowed by their aged authority.
Her village is limited,
News travels by yentas,
Not newspapers,
And it will remain that way.
As the years pass,
Her age will reveal itself,
Her dimples wrinkled.
And the chill of the land will envelop her,
Leaving her cold,
Forever.



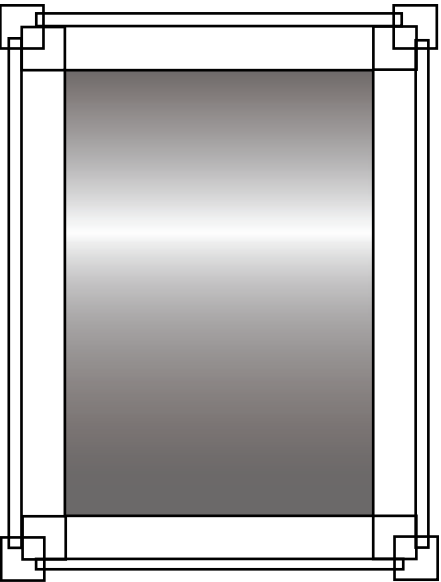
One of the great gifts announcing itself in this poem is that within the singular experience it's possible to sense a larger, more communal, experience. While the poem appears on its surface as a portrait poem of a Russian lady, she can also be understood in mythological terms.
— Brian Turner

RUSSIAN LADY

Lindsey Gofton

First Place – Poetry

Quietly she closes the door,
And drops her bathrobe.
Fearing the mirror,
She dampens two surrounding bulbs.



Even in the diminished light,
Her body reflects as a barrel.
Writing a harsh remark on the weight card,
She punishes herself with one less meal plate.

If only tape,
Maybe foil,
Could seal in the barrel or,
Change the card.

A heartbreaking woman now re-twists the bulbs,
Turns on the lights,
Ties her bathrobe,
And walks out the door.

I'm impressed by the economy of language used in this poem. The word "heartbreaking" in the final stanza is part of the hinge that brings the reader back to the poem, again and again. This poet recognizes that a single word can open the doorway into mystery, curiosity, and wonder.
— Brian Turner

MIRROR IMAGE

Lindsey Gofton

Second Place – Poetry

One Night is an imaginative story of increasing intimacy between two people and as the story progresses so does the tension. No gender is assigned to either of the characters and this ambiguity coupled with the second person narration really pulls the reader in with an enjoyable stress. The first paragraph describes everything and nothing at the same time: “It’s the first time I’ve been to your house, in your room. It looks like you, your personality, everything that makes you, you; I love every inch of it.” This sets the tone for the entire story while leaving it up to the reader to decide which character is male, which is female, or are they the same sex? As the story goes on each line of dialogue and every action plays with gender stratification society teaches people since childhood and in this way it keeps the reader guessing and maybe even questioning these gender roles. Isn’t that one of the jobs of great writing, to challenge social issues? I believe so and I believe this story does the job well. — Sean Davis

It’s the first time I’ve been to your house, in your room. It looks like you, your personality, everything that makes you, you; love every inch of it.

We hang out, just as friends, until it’s time for bed.

I’m lying on your mattress in my pajamas— a tank top and shorts, for I am comfortable around you— waiting for you to join me. You’re much more shy than I am, your movements hesitant and nervous. I can tell you don’t really want to do this, but we both know it’s too late to back out now.

My eyes take in the new sight before me: you in your T-shirt and boxer shorts, an outfit you think nothing of; I lick my lips when you sit down on the edge of the bed, your actions slow as you try to avoid what is inevitable.

Eventually you’re lying next to me, stiff, sweaty, and anxious. “Relax,” I tell you, “It’s not like we’re....” I

leave a pause for you to fill in the blank. You nod, still weary.

I slide close to you and instantly mold into your side, like I’m supposed to be there. One of my hands is settled atop your chest, the other tucked between us, my head resting gently on your shoulder, our legs touching.

Happiness floods through me as my most desired wish comes true, my nerves sparking and tingling as we touch in new ways that border on the edge of intimacy,



ONE NIGHT

Elizabeth Mahlstedt

Richard Colwell Award – Short Story



the two of us becoming closer than ever before. Your arm is draped around my neck and shoulder; I can feel your fingers brush lightly against my back.

“See?” I smile up at you, “this isn’t so bad.” You give a shrug, an expected response.

I resist the strong urge to kiss you, not wanting to push your unease even further and ruin everything. Instead, after a few minutes of companionable silence, I whisper, “Thank you.” A hum of acceptance comes from within your closed lips.

Sleep eventually takes me long before it takes you. I drift off, not worrying about what you’ll say tomorrow or how you’ll react or change due to this whole situation, but with more joy and contentedness than I’ve felt in years, finally glad I get to lay in your arms, even if it is only for a night.



Even though it was past eleven at night, New York City was still a swirling hub of movement and chatter. This activity made it even easier for one small, lithe girl to quickly integrate herself into the masses on the sidewalk outside the Met, backpack bobbing in sync with her long, curly ponytail. She barely disrupted the flow, nodding an apology to the couple she cut off with her sudden entrance from the alley that connected to the museum’s service door and setting off for an apartment building fifteen blocks away. No one noticed that the backpack looked awfully light, maybe even empty, but then again, why would they? People were always doing weird things in New York. She was at least more normal than the man painted blue on the corner, who looked to be doing some sort of interpretive dancing.

The girl, Lexi to those who liked her (Alexis or “that goddamn brat” to those who didn’t), silently congratulated herself on another job well done. She had managed to pass herself off as a new night security guard just long enough to sneak into the Renaissance art exhibit that was opening tomorrow and leave a little present that was sure to be found at exactly the right moment—at least, if everything went according to plan. After that, it was pathetically easy to ditch her borrowed uniform and walk out the service doors like she owned the place.

Lexi rounded a corner and came to a halt in an alleyway between two fairly nice apartment buildings. She craned her head back, making sure no one was out for a late night smoke or something similar before she started her climb. Seeing that all the terraces were empty, she began to propel herself up the fire escape ladders of the building opposite the one she wanted to enter—she had learned from previous experience that the neighbor building kept their ladders oiled so they stayed smooth and silent, while her target building’s ladders sounded like a hundred cats in heat whenever the slightest pressure was put on them. Explaining that mistake away had taken more acting ability than she knew she possessed; thankfully, the cop called that night had a soft spot for brunettes and a robbery four blocks away to investigate.

She made her way to the thirteenth floor easily, muscles used to flexing and pulling her weight, pausing about every second story or so to make sure she was still unseen and alone. Then came the trickiest part of her ascent—crossing the

slight gap between the two buildings’ terraces. She knew that the tenants of the apartment she was currently outside were light sleepers, waking if a bird hit their patio furniture. The man in the opposite apartment slept soundly, but also owned a gun, and if the commotion of his across-the-way neighbors woke him up, he’d have it drawn on her before she could say “cat burglar.”

Lexi carefully aligned herself with the side of the terrace of the light sleepers from her perch on the fire escape. *Three...two...one...jump!* she counted down in her head in order to set a rhythm for her motions. She put just enough force in her jump to propel her to the terrace railing, but not so much that she’d slam into it—her bruise from the last time she had done this climb was barely fading, and she didn’t want to seriously injure herself. Clinging to the cool metal bars, she steadily made her way to the front and then climbed on top of the safety rail, crouching with her knees to her chest for a second to catch her balance. Once she felt safe (well, as safe as possible while thirteen stories above hard cement on someone else’s terrace), she straightened enough to get into a position resembling a diver’s crouch and pushed off that balcony, landing with the kind of agility that comes from years of practice on her target patio.

She took a moment to straighten up and do a gymnast-esque “stuck the landing!” pose before pulling a bobby pin out of her hair and using it to jimmy the lock open on the sliding glass door that comprised the fourth wall of the terrace. Slipping off her shoes, she started walking to the en-suite bathroom when she accidentally stubbed her big toe into the dresser that was just a bit too big for the space the bedroom allowed, making a solid *thunk!* sound. She groaned quietly, but not soft enough to keep from waking the room’s occupant.

“Lex, how the hell do you manage to scale both familiar and unfamiliar apartment buildings flawlessly but run into a piece of furniture that’s been in the same spot since we moved to this place?” her boyfriend Will asked sleepily, rolling over to face her and rubbing his eyes. “Also, you know you can just use the front door like a normal person, right?”

“I don’t wanna get out of practice, Honey,” Lexi replied. “You never know when my, um, ‘skills’ may come in handy.” She made air quotes when she said “skills,” since that was what Will always called her thieving abilities. She preferred to think of them as a talent—not everyone could

do what she did, after all. “You’ll thank me one day,” she called out, as she walked into the bathroom to change into the old boxer shorts and faded T-shirt that were her pajamas.

“Whatever you say, Babe.” Will’s tone was impossibly snarky. He’d be eating those words soon enough, though.

“Just go back to sleep, Will. You’ve got a long day tomorrow, Mr. Police Chief. Can’t fall asleep at that gallery opening at the Met when they unveil their newest Renaissance works.” Lexi came out of the bathroom and crawled into bed next to Will, curling up to his warmth and resting her head on his collarbone. “I think you’re gonna need to be extra watchful, personally.”

“And why is that?” Will said through a yawn.

“One of those works has something...special about it. You’ll see. Now *shhhh.*” Lexi stroked the back of his sandy blond hair as she started to nod off, too. She planned on hiding in the back of the gallery to see his reaction—after all, it wasn’t every day that your kind-of-ex-thief girlfriend sneaked into the Met to hide an engagement ring box in the focal piece of their new exhibit. Sure, it wasn’t traditional, but neither was their relationship. Hell, knowing Will, she thought he’d probably end up cuffing her then and there, “sentencing” her to a lifetime with him, cheesy little shit that he was.

And I’m willingly taking that punishment, too, was Lexi’s last coherent thought before drifting off to sleep and dreaming of a really unusual game of “Cops and Robbers.”

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STEALING YOUR HEART

Jennifer Noble

First Place – Short Story

Go ahead. What difference could it make? You took one bite, why not another. If only you would look in a mirror and see yourself! Would that even make a difference? Probably not. It'd only be a poor attempt at self-restraint. Restraint that you don't have and never will until you admit it. The truth will come out eventually. Everyone else can see it. You can see it. Just listen to them and yourself and don't take another bite! It's poison. Once on the lips, forever on the hips. As if your hips aren't huge enough.

Sonya bit her already raw bottom lip with enough force to draw a dribble of blood. The metallic taste tinged her tongue making her pull her sharp bones back into her mouth where they belonged. Gently, she tapped her lip and pulled back her scarred finger to see the bright red blood coat it, little swirls merging with the ridges of her prints. Then her gaze focused past her blood dipped finger to what she had been staring at and scolding herself over in the first place. The thing she knew she shouldn't touch. Wasn't one bite enough?

Two hundred thirty-nine calories in that small piece of cake. Two hundred and thirty-nine. Then again, the chances are that the cake is bigger than the standard size so why not add twenty more calories to be on the safe side. Don't forget the extra ten just because the nutritional facts are always wrong by at least that much. That would bring it to two hundred and sixty-nine calories. Two hundred and sixty-nine was too many calories. Add that to the side salad that you picked at for breakfast. One

cup lettuce at five calories (no, ten calories), topped with a tablespoon of grated cheddar cheese at thirty-five calories (no, forty-five calories), and one egg white diced at twenty calories (no, thirty calories) totaling at eighty-five calories for breakfast alone. An okay amount if that had been all but no, breakfast was followed by lunch at a Chinese buffet where the count of calories were lost and you really want to add two hundred sixty-nine plus calories to the countless thousands that were more than likely consumed at the disgustingly greasy restaurant? Fat pig!

With trembling white hands, Sonya picked up her icy silver fork and speared the cake. The first bite had been amazing. The moist bread substance had melted in her mouth as her teeth grinded it to little bits of mosh. It was the bit of frosting left behind on the fork that the girl had licked

away that had taste the best. Sweet and sugary with the rich, dark, fudge chocolate. Really, it was only two hundred and sixty-nine additional calories. What could that little bitty number hurt? Everything. Sonya took the second bite, followed by another and another. The fork wouldn't stop and soon the cake turntable with the fresh cake was licked clean of any traceable crumbs.

Just moments ago that egg shell white turntable had been almost half full and now it was empty and bare.

You idiot! Now look what you've done. Go. Go now! Get rid of it. Get rid of all of it. The bathroom, yes the bathroom. The medicine cabinet with the syrup of ipecac. Drink it fast before your body starts to absorb that disgusting mess too. With any luck it will void everything you

have in your gut, and with any luck, you will have not taken in too many calories to add to your blubber.

Sonya obeyed her subconscious and raced off to the medicine cabinet with the framework of pine and a freshly cleaned mirror. In the mirror, it stared Sonya's reflection. Her cheeks were flushed red, her dull brown eyes wild, her previously bleeding lips were speckled with chocolate crumbs and traces of chocolate frosting. In reality, her cheeks were hallowed so her zygomatic bones pressed against the taunt pale skin. Deep in her mind and shinning clearly in her eyes, Sonya saw the exact opposite. She saw puffed out cheeks that went to cover the bottom of her eyes. Instead of a skinny neck that a single hand could easily fit around, Sonya saw a blubbery mess that four hands could just barely manage to clasps.

Furious at herself for touching the cake, the Chinese, and even the salad, Sonya wrenched open the cabinet door swiping away the college girl that had been watching her and revealing the rows of medicine, the whole top row lined neatly with syrup of ipecac. Each bottle frequently held 2 doses, and the stores were starting to ban them due to problems with people with eating disorders. Silly women, thinking some medicine could cure them. Of course, Sonya wasn't amongst that class. She just needed to lose the next three pounds and see if she looked any better. That's why she was drinking the last dose in the small bottle and sitting on the edge of the plastic tub waiting for it to kick in.

With her strangled red hair caught up in her thin hands, the young girl began to cry. Tears racked her cheeks as the sobs tore at her body. She just wanted to be skinny and pretty like the other girls. The girls that all of the guys looked at and asked out onto dates. Never once had a guy gone up to her to talk to her. She had boyfriends, but she was always the one who started it. It shouldn't be like that. The guy should ask the lady and that's what Sonya wanted. One day she would have that; she would have a guy come up to her and talk to her first. She would have that first guy ask her on a date and comment on how beautiful she looked. But

that couldn't and wouldn't happen until she was skinny. She had to be skinny and that's what this ipecac would help with, as it doubled her over the porcelain basin and forced her to retch everything she had sitting inside her out for the next two hours. *You should have listened to me....*

All of it haunted Sonya. Watching T.V., looking through the internet, listening to the radio. The T.V. premiered commercials of teeny supermodels that could fit into size double zero jeans. The internet showed photos of more models or fellow classmates that were small enough to be considered pretty. Even the radio spoke of pills and trials for weight loss, many of which Sonya had tried with so little success. There was nowhere to go to get away from it, and it was a constant reminder.

After a shaky night rest, Sonya had pulled out the scale from under her bathroom sink and placed it on the floor. Her small size six foot tapped at the glass demanding for the digital numbers to flash on in red lines. With a deep breath, she hopped on. Muscles taunt and breath held Sonya watched the zeros spin around until they finally decided to change and land on two numbers: Nighty-Eight. The bright numbers sent needles into her heart, and she let her body drag down in a depressed sigh. Zero point three pounds more than what she had weighed at before she went to bed. The calories from the night before had caught up with her. *Of course they would, you obese cow.*

The disappointment burned away but it didn't change much. There was still a life to be lived and schooling to be done. For now, all that could be done was to put away the scale and start the day off right: Breakfast, the most important meal of the day. There was no use opening the fridge and no use pawing through the cabinets. Gaining weight meant there was only one option for breakfast. There would be only one door opened and that was the door with the glasses. A glass with white snowflakes was pulled out, and Sonya filled it with cold water and downed it as quickly as if it were air. Again she filled it up and drained it. Once more, she repeated the act before setting the cup down

SKINNY IS BEAUTIFUL

Davon Morris

Second Place – Short Story

and looking out the window. It wasn't much but twenty-four ounces would fill her small stomach for a little while keeping the clawing pain of hunger at bay for a couple hours. The icy water pushing out her stomach would be enough to get her through her morning ten mile run.

The run had started out as just a mile in the beginning a couple years ago and slowly it escalated. The mile gained another one followed by a third one in a few months and so forth until she was running the ten miles to and from school each week day. On Saturday and Sunday, along with the holidays, she would run double that pairing it with the elliptical that sat precisely centered in the middle of her living room. Rare occasions, about every weekend, she would be on the elliptical the whole day while studying having her textbooks and papers propped up on an easel she brought just for that purpose.

Today, however, was a Tuesday, which meant she had school, and regardless of the wind lashing out and tearing at Sonya's pulled back hair and chapped cheeks and the snow slicing into her skin ignoring the layers of clothing she bore, Sonya was still running making her way to her school. *The wind pulling you back will only make you stronger. It will force you to work harder which will burn more calories. Burning more calories means that you will loss those revolting ounces that you gained last night by stuffing your ugly face. If you're lucky, you'll even burn enough to shed more than what you gained. Eventually, you will get down to ninety-five pounds. It just takes work, hard work and self-restraint. Something you may need a lesson in.*

The rant inside her mind was snapped in half as Sonya slipped, losing her footing and tossing her body back. Quickly, her arms shot out to steady her and she skipped off the black ice that had nearly killed her. Closing her eyes tightly, Sonya took a deep breath to calm her nerves then opened her brown eyes. Snowflakes spun around her and the ground swayed, as a small lady her age ran past her avoiding the black ice that Sonya had just slipped on a moment before no doubt seeing Sonya's near death experience.

Catching sight of Sonya swaying before her, she stopped. *Why can't you be that small? Oh my gosh! You are just so fat! I bet you she has self-restraint. Unlike your weak ass, she probably watches what she eats and works out. I bet she even has guys asking her out left and right. When will you get it? Beauty comes with weight. You can't be beautiful without being skinny.*

The rant continued in Sonya's mind even as the world spun, and the woman in front of her tried to speak to her. Nothing made sense to Sonya. The edges started to become fuzzy and the women shouted something behind her as she lunged for Sonya who was quickly falling to the ground all the while her subconscious shouting in her skull. *Fat. Fat! Why can't you just be skinny! You're fat! Fat! Fat! Fat!*

"Well, no. Your daughter is not fine. While she is stable, she has a serious eating disorder," a whispered voice spoke. The doctor.

Beep. Beep. Beep. "Yes, we know. We've had her in rehab multiple times but..." The choked cry of Sonya's mother cut out.

"Is there any way to force her to stay in rehab?" Sonya's father spoke, his voice firm but the pain eminent.

A hospital. Sonya was in a hospital. Gathering consciousness, she could feel the IV jammed in her arm leaking its fluid and filling her body with sugary venom. No! She couldn't be in a hospital again, and she would not, would *not*, go to rehab again. As she had countless times before, Sonya tried to reach over to tear the IV out of her arm and run but.... Her arms wouldn't move. Eyes flashing open, she whirled her head around looking at her arms. They were tied down! She couldn't do this! She couldn't go through this again! Just a couple more pounds. A couple more pounds and maybe, just maybe she would be perfect....

— — — — — — — — — — —

Life

has not turned out quite like I thought it would be. If it had, I would not be comparing my marriage to my truck.

There is a story behind both my marriage and my truck, and the funny thing is, they are more alike than one might realize. First is the beginning; the purchase of a shiny new vehicle, along with the excitement of a new romance. Next, throughout time, is the maintenance to both vehicle and relationship. Finally, the big decision: is it worth keeping? My marriage of ten years is like my treasured Chevy S-10 Extreme.

My husband and my truck came into my life at the same time. It was my senior year of high school, 2001. I met my husband years before, and 2001 was the year we would

start our relationship. A month after my husband and I became an official couple, we took the money I saved for years and paid cash for a 2000 Chevy S-10 Extreme. Life was exciting! I had a popular, handsome young man, and a shiny new set of wheels that needed to be shown off. And shown off they were! My husband had traveled to

so many places I never would have thought of going. We spent the summer after high school graduation in different parts of Pennsylvania. My faithful S-10 took us to the Penn State Campus, Gettysburg, and Hershey Park, which were some

of the most beautiful parts of the country that I had never seen. Although it is just a truck, it has been there to share some wonderful moments, just as my husband.

From the first line to the conclusion of the essay the author stays on point. Each paragraph acts as another brick to cement the powerful and somewhat jovial thesis. While the subject is intensely personal there is an underlining humor and an accessibility that allows the reader to relate. We all go through life altering decisions at some point and this essay shows us we're all in this together, and that is one of the more powerful aspects about the craft of writing. — Sean Davis

MARRIAGE IS LIKE A TRUCK

Synthia Clemons

Kathleen Nickerson Award – Essay



Years passed, and along came the maintenance. My husband and I got married, and a few years later came our beautiful boys. My husband and I began to argue over almost everything. There was not one decision I was able to make on my own without running it through my husband first. If we were going to stay married, then we needed to fix what we had and make it work. At the same time, things started going wrong with my truck. Just as any vehicle, starters, tires, and parts need to be replaced over time. Every time I would fix my truck, I would pray that it would get me through another year. Every time my husband and I hit what felt like a brick wall, I prayed that we would just get through it.

I now have been with my husband and have had my truck for twelve years. The arguing between my husband and I has gotten worse. My truck has rust holes, needs another set of tires, and needs more work than I can afford to put into it. My marriage has come to the point where I cannot afford to waste anymore of my time, breath, or even love on someone who just does not care. I find myself trying to decide whether or not to sell my truck before it breaks down completely. Like my truck, I find myself deciding whether or not it is worth staying in this marriage. I have made so many

years and memories with my husband and my truck which makes it hard to make a clear decision. There is a decision to be made for both; keep it or get rid of it.

My marriage is more like my truck than I ever imagined. Everything started out all shiny and new. I have made some pretty amazing memories with my husband and my truck. All the years I have spent on the maintenance on both my marriage and truck made me begin to think about my options. It breaks my heart to think of divorce or selling my truck, however, decisions have to be made to better myself and keep my children safe.



I had never given much thought to telephones. They are not an integral part of who I am. I grew up in a home where there were none. That being said, I can easily say that I hate this new world filled with phones. A zombie apocalypse may not be science fiction when you consider the zombie of today is one mindlessly controlled not by infection, but by the hideous compulsion to use a phone. They are a convenience that has now become too convenient. The current epidemic state of cellular phone use is one to which I refuse to succumb.

Most people nowadays cannot remember a time when they did not have a phone. As children, there would have been a landline in the home. Perhaps, later in life, they would have transitioned to a cell phone. For a small minority, however, the former and latter do not apply. Some may have grown up in the telephonic age but were not readily immersed in such since birth. I am one of those people.

I was around fifteen years old when my family got a phone for the first time. I remember, though, that it was never a permanent fixture of our house. We had our service disconnected so often that I eventually did not bother to remember what the number was because I knew as soon as I had it memorized, we would lose the phone yet again. One time, after I had called my friend regularly over the course of a few weeks, he called me. It was not until the following week, when I got a letter from him, that he was able to tell me he tried to call but was connected to McDonalds! Growing up, I

was somewhat resentful about not having a phone the majority of the time, but now I feel quite different. Now, I remember those days as a peaceful time, as a life where if you wanted to talk to someone you actually had to walk next door.

Everywhere you look these days there is someone on a cell phone. Whether they are talking to someone

This essay asks an important question in our modern era: has our age of convenience become too convenient and what does that mean to our society? Do cellphones, mobile apps, and social media create as many problems as they help? This essay asks these questions while using well thought out examples to illustrate the author's precise opinion on this focused subject. The writing is solid and uses great personal examples which makes it a fun read. — Sean Davis

a continent away or texting a friend two streets over, you cannot throw a dead cat without hitting a cell phone. According to smartplanet.com, there are just about as many cellular phones in use on the planet today as there are people. Soon the number of handheld communication devices will eclipse the human population. While at the advent of the cellular age these products may have brought people together, cell phones are now isolating them more than they may have the capacity to realize.

I sat at my computer the other morning, wandering lazily through the world that is Facebook in a pair of gray

sweats and last night's t-shirt, my hair as wild as that of a mad scientist, when I came across something very interesting. As I tiredly ate my bowl of store-brand corn flakes and scrolled down through post after post of frivolous commentary, I saw one that largely illustrated today's cell phone obsession.

The posting depicted scenes throughout any given day that would traditionally showcase togetherness. They were social situations, like having coffee with friends or eating dinner with the family, but everyone was fixated on a phone. Nobody paid any attention to whomever they were with. What I found particularly disturbing was the lack of emotion on their faces. There was an eerie coldness, an inhuman emptiness, emanating from each

individual like a switch had been flipped. These people reminded me of those stiff, primitive looking robots you would see in B movies from the 40's and 50's. I daydreamed of a world where humans actually took the next evolutionary step in technological hybridism and directly implanted cellular devices. As I came back to the here and now, I concluded that despite the immediate presence of others, each person felt the need to forsake their company for someone, or something, somewhere else. My spoon was held frozen half way to my mouth when I got to the scene

of a couple out on a date and neither acknowledged the other because they were each staring stone faced at their phone.

The uneaten spoonful of cereal found its way back to the blue plastic bowl as I contemplated the last panel of the post. It had a caricature of Albert Einstein accompanied by one of his quotes. He finished with a dire outcome should humanity ever reach that point. He said, "I fear the day that technology will surpass human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots." That day, in my judgment, is already upon us.

I was literally taken aback as I scooted my rickety chair squeakily away from the cluttered desk. Images flashed in front of my mind's eye like those of a computer gone haywire. I had seen these same situations countless times in real life, but they did not fully register as evidence of isolationism until just that moment. There was the time when I was over visiting a friend and he texted his mother, asking her what was for dinner. We were in the living room, and she was in the kitchen. And that is not even the end...she answered back with a text of her own! Another example was when I was at a rock concert this summer. I went to see Hinder in July and everybody was packed in close like sardines. All around me concert goers videoed the band, which is a common practice these days. What I found to be odd was that nearby, out of a group of teenagers, four were looking at the screen of a fifth. Here they were, at a live concert, the band literally twenty feet away, and they watched the performance on the tiny screen of a camera phone.

What happened to the world? Was this reality? How did this strange sterility enter our way of life? Those kids may have been watching the show with each other but the manner in which they viewed the concert extracted them from the rest of the entire audience. They cheated themselves out of being part of the larger collective. I took my half-eaten bowl of cereal to the empty kitchen sink and with each step thought of the growing detachment that is prevalent in today's world. Like that sink, I felt cold, gray, and seemingly without purpose. I walked into the den and sat dejectedly on the deflated green couch and reflected upon the current age of communication. One day, long ago, that couch was lavishly plush and serenely

beautiful, as was humanity's humanness. This day found that old piece of furniture with perpetually sad seat cushions and various muted shades of a once vibrant emerald. Personal interaction just may be the next thing we place out on the curb, deemed to be out of date in this modern world.

Through some introspective thought, I pondered my own fledgling relationship with the cell phone. This past March, at thirty-three, I got one for the first time in my life. In the beginning, I simply talked to friends and family back in my former home of northern Wisconsin. Not long thereafter I learned that most people actually text message. My phone usage, while minimal at first, steadily grew over the last eight months and I also began to text more and more. I could now see that as much as I detested the amount other people used their cell phone, I was unknowingly becoming one of them.

My thoughts then shifted to the actual texts that fly through air on a daily basis. I realized that there is yet another, somewhat hidden consequence of the world's dependence on cell phones. Some in the younger generations, and a few from older ones, are increasingly exhibiting a spelling deficiency. Admittedly, text messaging shorthand is conducive to quicker text messages which can be easily understood. However, that shorthand has no place in proper writing, the workplace, or any scholastic setting. The lines between when and where those abbreviations and acronyms are permissible are quickly becoming confused. When technology derails basic education such as spelling and reading comprehension, there must be a point where we acknowledge the backward step.

Einstein viewed the world firsthand with his eyes, not through the lens of a camera. Moving pictures were a marvel back then, not a staple of life that could fit in the palm of a hand. When he sent a written message, he wrote, "I shall see you at five this evening," not, "CU @ 5tnite." Although he may not have envisioned the particular devices used in the world today, he did foresee that humanity's g

rowing dependence on technology would overpower the value of education. Students are still taught how to write properly, but the time it takes is a luxury the world no longer seems

to have. The tools humanity has at its disposal are becoming an inescapable extension of who we are. The reality of being within a generation of idiots may be a hard pill to swallow, but we have only ourselves to blame.

This Facebook post was a mirror that showed me I am also susceptible to the lure of instant communication. As I lay back on the amazingly still plush rear cushions of the ancient couch and closed my eyes to the technology ruled world around me, I recognized modern reality for the whirlpool it was. I now have a stronger resolve to resist that pull as much as I can. I do not wish to fully embrace that which I personally dislike in others. If I did, that acquiescence would not only turn me into another zombie of the "cellocolypse," but such action would also make me a hypocrite.

Technology definitely serves a purpose in our world and does promote the idea of togetherness. We have eliminated distance as a hurdle in speaking to anyone, anywhere, at any time, on the entire planet. We also now have the ability to see whoever that other person, or persons, may be. Cell phones have their place in our lives, and they are here to stay. Nevertheless, when we transfer direct human relationships with other humans to relationships universally facilitated by a handheld device, we have gone too far.

To talk to each other is one of the greatest gifts we possess. Once it was a commonplace skill that was practiced by all. Now talking to one another has become a talent that only a few strive to master. Our dependence on cell phones may have been destined long before any of us bought one. But we have the choice of shutting them off. We have the choice of turning to the next person and saying, "Hello." We have the choice of walking into the kitchen and asking the cook, "What is for dinner?" We have the choice to take back our humanity.

With renewed energy I extracted myself from that trap of a couch and said goodbye to the quicksand of technology. I intend to adhere to the old ways and hold the directly spoken word as sacred. I may still own a cellular phone, but it will never own me.

CELL PHONES AND MODERN DETACHMENT

Gerald Crowe

First Place – Essay

December 13, 2005 4:59 PM—I will remember this date and time until the end of my days, for this is when my sense of personal safety was destroyed. I was twenty-three years old, working as a bank teller, and that night I became the victim in a bank robbery. A semi-automatic rifle with a laser scope was pointed at my head for the longest 50 seconds of my life; even now I get a deep sense of unease when I see the red dot of a laser pointer. Before December 13, 2005, I had never really seen, or been the victim of, a truly violent incident. I had always known what was required to be “safe:” never walk alone at night, don’t get into a car with strangers, and always let someone know your whereabouts. At the bank, we were trained to be prepared for a robbery, but I never imagined anything bad would ever really happen. The robbery changed me; I am now a much more cautious person and do my best to stay out of dangerous situations.

In “A Peaceful Woman Explains Why She Carries a Gun,” the author Linda M. Hasselstrom shares with her readers the events that led to her decision to own and carry a gun with her constantly. Linda M. Hasselstrom and I share several characteristics; we are both peace-loving women who practice “safety” and we have both had violent encounters. I am not going to say that any of the encounters Linda Hasselstrom mentions in “A Peaceful Woman Explains Why She Carries a Gun” aren’t terrible situations where I too would feel unsafe, but I think Ms. Hasselstrom had other options and at times behaved unwisely. I also am not going to say that all gun ownership should be banned; in fact, I

believe people have the right to protect their home in the event of an attack or robbery. I am against the ability to conceal and carry a weapon, or CCW. Carrying a concealed weapon at all times can turn a cautious individual into someone with a false sense of power and authority. Instead of preventing violence, constantly carrying a gun can instead entice it. In fact, studies have shown that the mere presence of a weapon alters moods; people become more defensive and anger is aroused easily.

Ms. Hasselstrom notes that “with some reluctance” she decided to get her CCW. She goes into detail about how she practiced shooting and how her husband taught her that “the most important preparation was mental: convincing myself I could actually shoot a person.” “I got in the habit of rehearsing, as I drove or walked, the precise conditions that would be required before I would shoot someone.” Now that Linda Hasselstrom

has a gun her thoughts change; they go from defensive to offensive. It seems she is no longer thinking of how to be safe and avoid danger but how the gun will change things. Perhaps she is thinking she and her gun will show the bad guys who’s boss after all.

Linda Hasselstrom states, “Just carrying a pistol is not protection; avoidance is still the best approach to trouble.” She tells of an encounter after she had gotten her gun and began taking it with her always. She was in her car and was driving to get her mail at the end of her very long driveway out in the country. Ms. Hasselstrom comes across four drunken men at the end of her driveway. She stops

her vehicle, window completely rolled down, and asks the men to leave and pick up their beer cans. Was this the best thing to do? No! She was outnumbered, alone, and in the middle of nowhere. Ms. Hasselstrom just put herself in a very dangerous situation. What she does next is even more shocking: (referencing the beer cans on the ground) “‘Right over there,’ I said, still being polite. ‘—there, and over there.’ I pointed with the pistol, which I’d slipped under my thigh.” Linda Hasselstrom just pulled her gun on the four men. She is very lucky that the intimidation of showing her pistol worked; this situation could have easily turned into a crime scene. This “peaceful woman” seemed to be trying to pick a fight; why is she not following her own advice of avoidance being the best choice? Because the gun at her side told her it would level the playing field. The decision to constantly carry a gun has dulled what her instincts once knew—avoid the four drunken men.

Being the victim of a violent crime, I understand all too well how Linda felt. How the feeling of terror and helplessness haunts you, and how you long for that feeling of safety you once knew. Once fear takes hold, it can morph a person’s perception of reality. Immediately following the robbery, I was not able to go into a crowd of people; my perception was that every single person in that crowd would hurt me. Thankfully over time I have been able to overcome most of the fear and am no longer debilitated by the constant worry and suspicion. Does the desire for feeling personal safety warrant the ability to conceal and carry a weapon? No, it does not. In fact the power of a weapon can turn a harmless situation of perceived danger into something else altogether; it could possibly result in a violent, albeit unintentional, crime. I wonder if Ms. Hasselstrom now feels safe and secure or is she still thinking about her fears. I think having the gun has changed Linda’s perception; she now perceives highly dangerous situations as manageable. To me, it seems clear that constantly carrying the gun has turned a peace loving woman into someone who has lost her natural instinct to avoid danger.

Linda, like many others, made the wrong choice in getting a CCW. Masked as the desire for protection was really the desire for power. Linda Hasselstrom quoted Lord Acton in her essay, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”



REBUTTAL TO “A PEACEFUL WOMAN EXPLAINS WHY SHE CARRIES A GUN”

Jillian Helsom

First Place – Essay

**AWARDED
ART**

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in the visual arts and is an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College. This year's recipient is...

JEREMY WILSON



In many ways exceeding the challenging requirements and expectations for the award, Jeremy Wilson's ambitions, intelligence and accomplishments complement the honor bestowed by the Patrick Bourke Award. As an artist and designer, Jeremy is self-directed and competent. He is a highly motivated student and person—producing excellent multi-faceted work, often with time to spare. His creative spirit, playful approach, productivity and attention to detail is an inspiration to others. In this way, he has the ability to lead by example; sharing with others a passion for art and design that defines him as a creative. Jeremy has been accepted and plans to continue his arts education at Wayne State University in fall 2014. His design work is demonstrated in the layout and compilation of this year's edition of *Patterns*.



HAND STUDY Shelby Castillo

First Place – Drawing



VISIT BERLIN

Craig DesJardins

Second Place – Digital Media



DAVID

Lauren Palmateer

Third Place – Drawing

**SELECTION
OF MERIT
ART**



BRAIN BOX

Savevone Sonsynath

Ceramics



“GLAZED” DONUT

Betsy Vollmar

Ceramics



MEAN MR. MUSTARD

Shelby Castillo

Drawing



STEAMPUNK

Markus Coleman

Drawing



INLAND, SILVER DRAGON

Jonathon T. Ferriell

Photography



WHEN I'M 64 (SELF PORTRAIT)

Shelby Castillo

Drawing



FORT GRATIOT LIGHTHOUSE & BLUE WATER BRIDGE

Clarissa Karling

Linocut



GRIMBLE'S HOME

Whitney Ward

Ceramics



STRIPE CLOUD

Clarissa Spangler

Photography



WINTER SCENE

Clarissa Spangler

Photography



REVERSE EFFECT

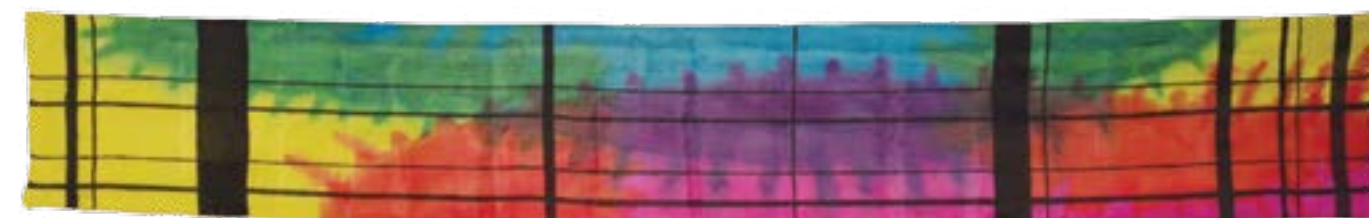
Bryan Billiet

Collage — Top

BOWL OF SPAGHETTI

Bryan Billiet

Multimedia — Bottom



MAN OF LA MANCHA

Bryan Billiet

Acrylic Paint — Top

SILKSCREEN SUNRISE

Bryan Billiet

Heat Sensitive Paper/Silk — Bottom



BONY HAND

Bryan Billiet

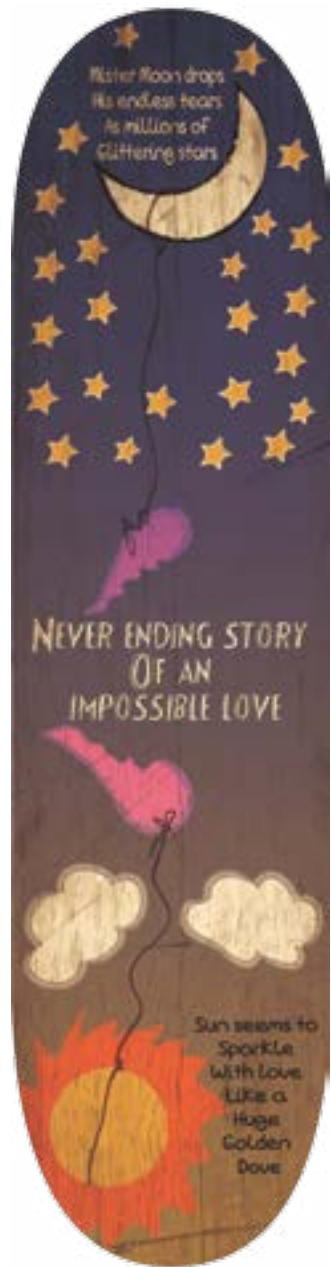
Foamcore with Origami



I WILL NOT SINK

Brad Stone

Digital Media



AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE

Kassandra Piotrowski

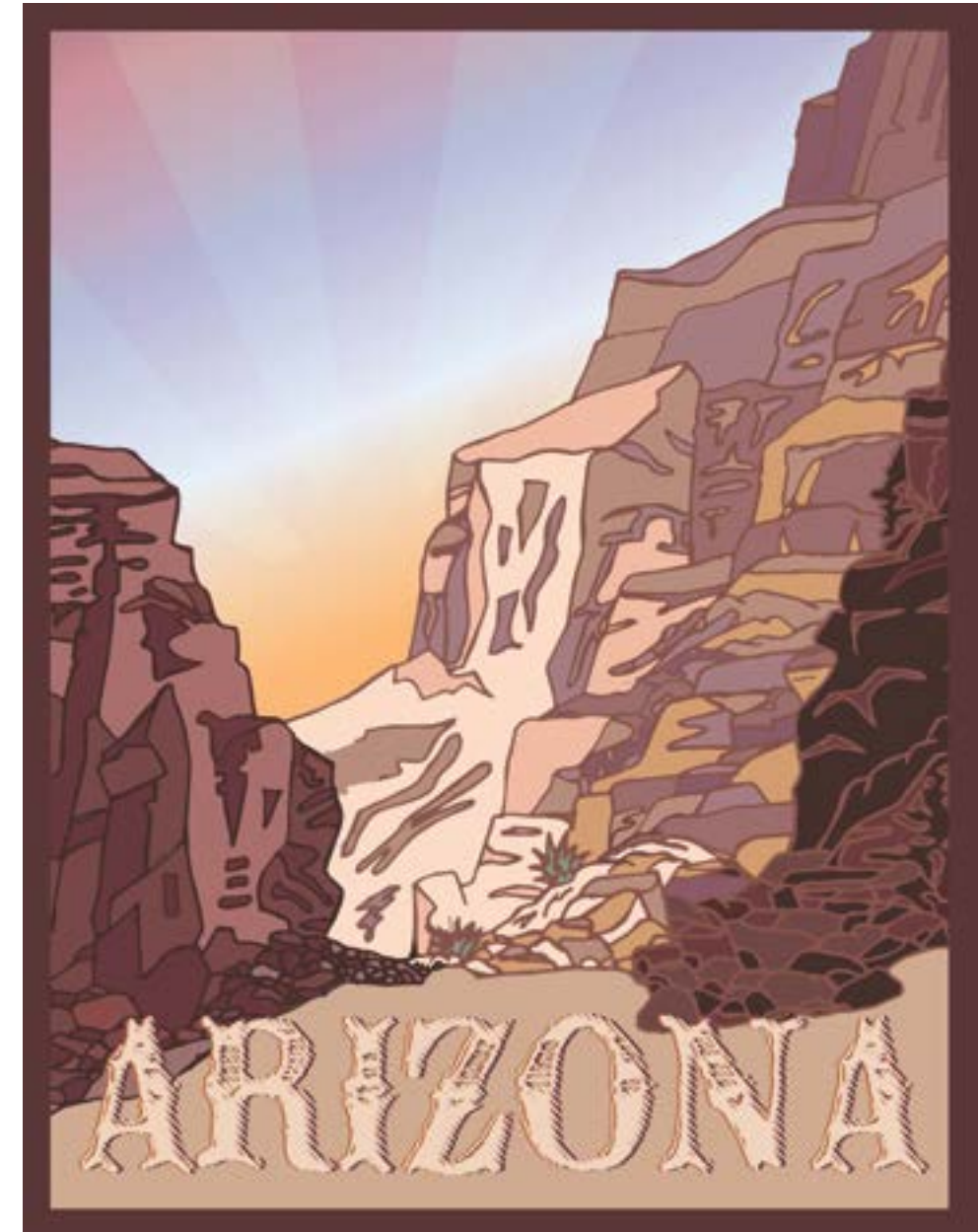
Digital Media



MOUNT BLANC TRAVEL POSTER

Anthony Petit

Digital Media



ARIZONA SUNSET

Tammy Tober

Digital Media



HORROR SHOW

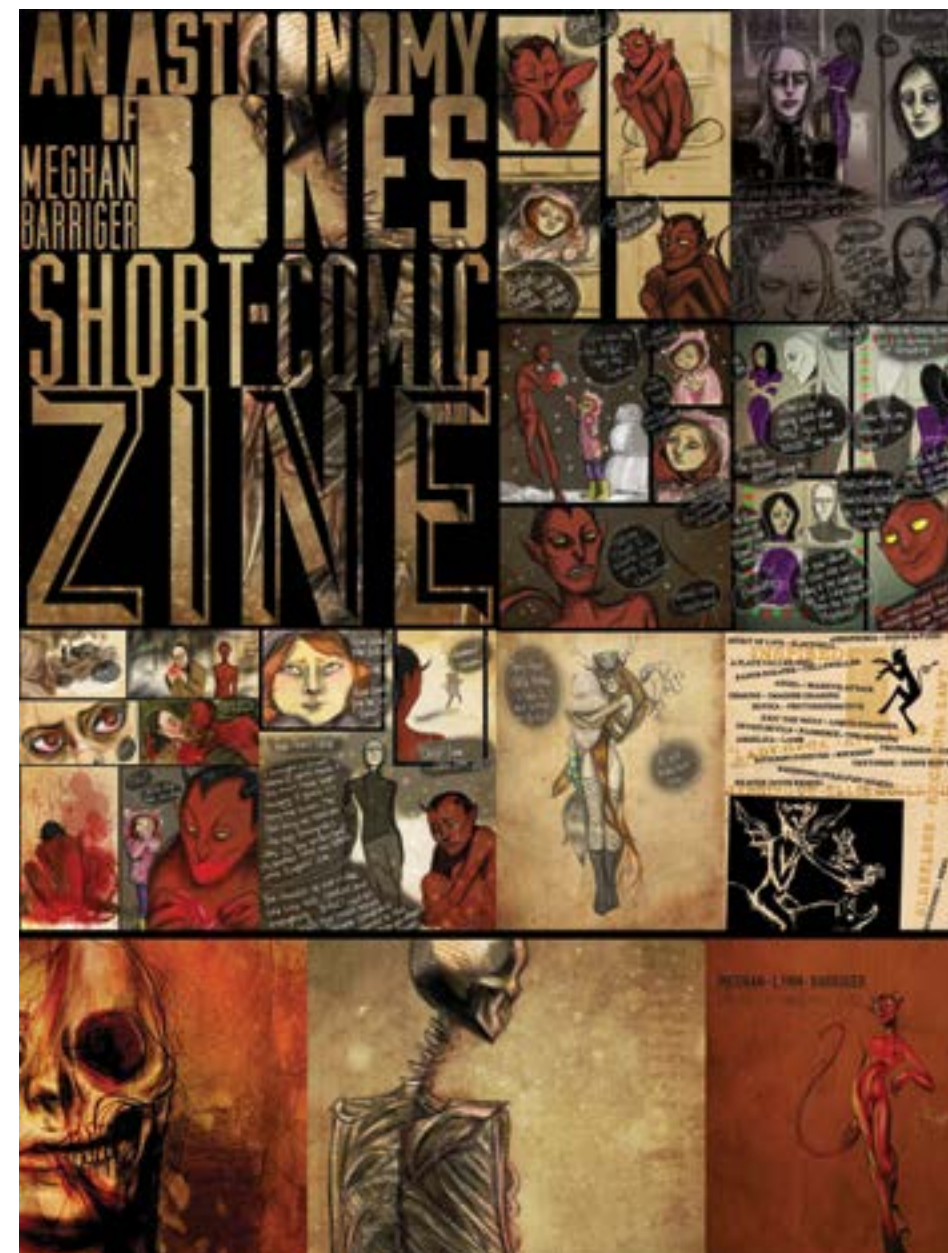
Meghan Barriger

Digital Media — Top

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Meghan Barriger

Digital Media — Bottom



ASTRONOMY OF BONES

Meghan Barriger

Digital Media



LOKI "I'M SORRY"

Meghan Barriger

Digital Media



THE SLY ONE

Meghan Barriger

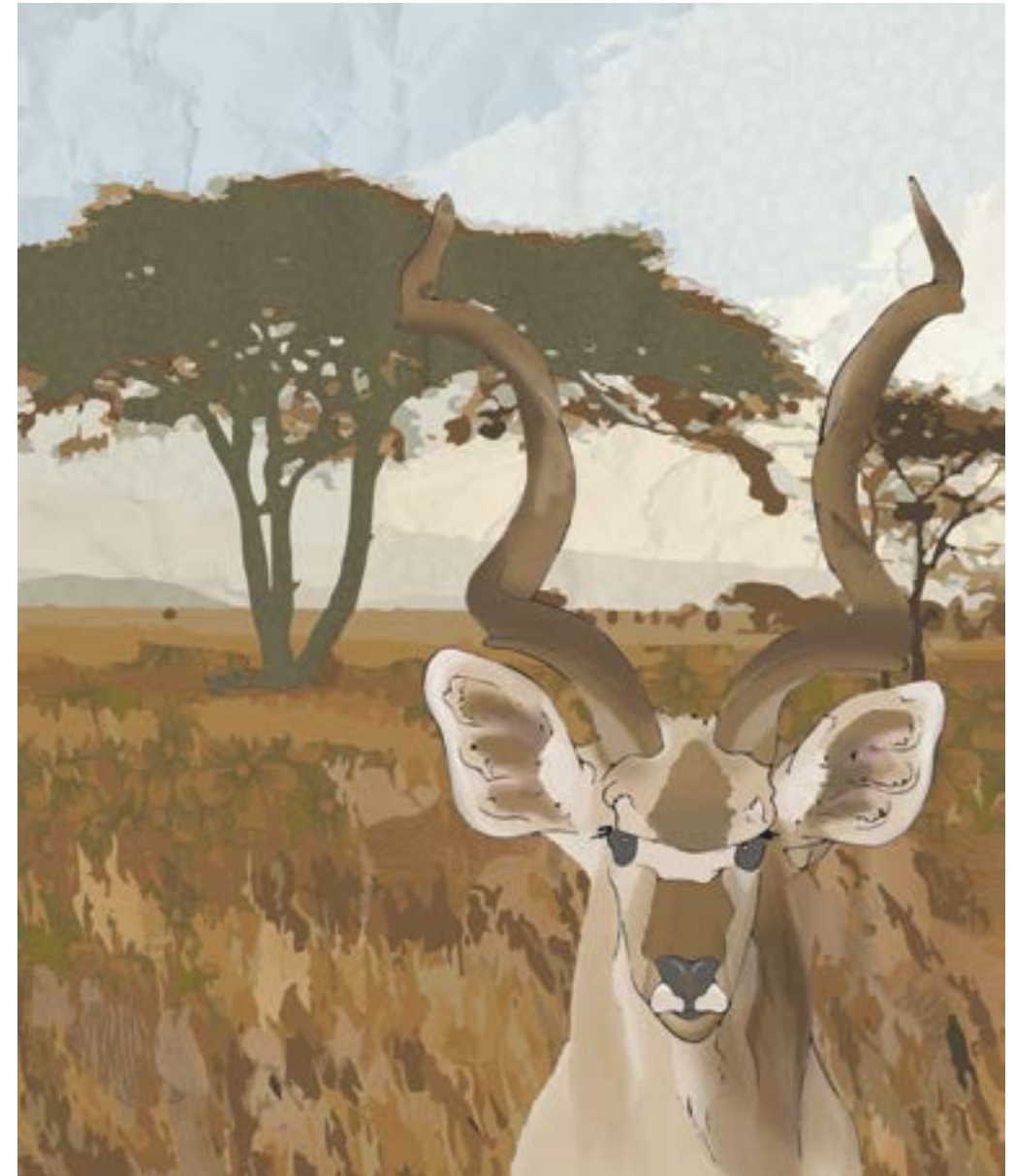
Digital Media



DERPY

Sheryl Penzien

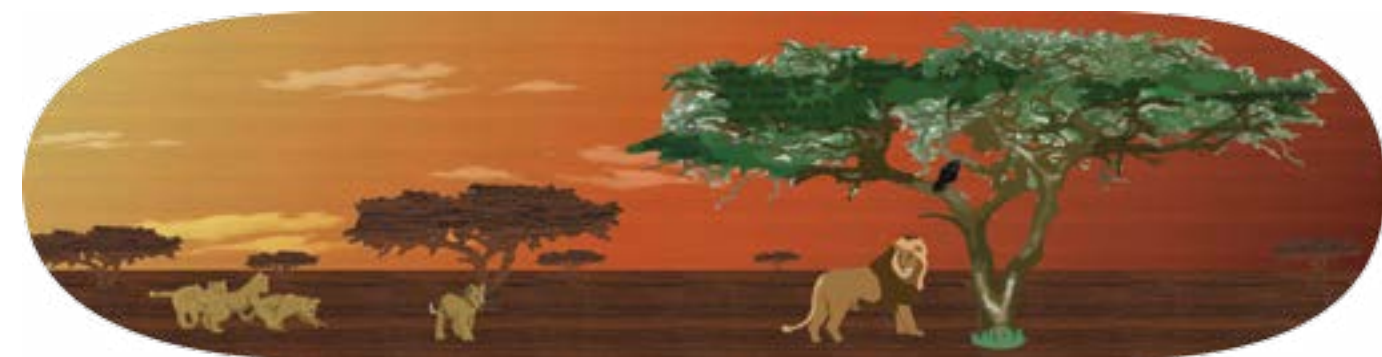
Digital Media



SUIT AND TIE

Sheryl Penzien

Digital Media



QUEEN TRITON

Craig DesJardins

Digital Media — Top

THERE ARE NO DOVES

Sheryl Penzien

Digital Media — Bottom



THE OWL

Jeremy Wilson

Digital Media

**SELECTION
OF MERIT
LITERARY**

Of all the new and unfamiliar things, or places, folks can encounter as a recent transplant to a different area, usually only one sticks out prominently. There are weird objects and strange localities that may be momentarily interesting, but then there is that one which makes people at once profoundly confused, provocatively interested, and, most importantly, immediately curious. Individuals find themselves contemplating this particular piece or area, however intermittently, for some time after that first contact. Subsequently, each time one sees the thing or goes to that place, one’s interest and curiosity is reinforced or reinvigorated. And for me, this is a rather large Day-Glo orange frog poised in a leisurely squat at the end of some random driveway twenty feet off Gratiot Avenue, just south of the St. Clair County International Airport.

Shortly after arriving in Port Huron, I was lackadaisically watching the springtime scenery of southeast Michigan flash by in an intoxicating cascade of vibrant hues from the passenger side of the middle row of my cousin’s Chrysler Towne and Country minivan. Rich greens and subtle yellows, interspersed with soft reds, pale whites, and just a touch of purple, mixed into a kaleidoscope of colors beyond the slightly tinted window. Mesmerized as I was by Nature’s canvas, imagine my surprise to see neon yellow out of the corner of my eye. I searched for the synthetic color with lightning speed to pinpoint the source of the incongruous newcomer to my field of vision. My eye zeroed in on a neon yellow frog that looked to be about four feet square and approximately two feet tall sitting majestically at the end of a private drive.

My brow crinkled as I studied the curiosity for the eternity we took in passing by. Time seemed to slow to a glacial pace while we, the frog and I, became acquainted. Then, the world caught up to me, and I was left with only my questions. *What in the world was that?* I wondered. *Did I just see that? What the...who the...why....* I had nothing.

What I did have was a vision of an out-of-place frog with soulless black eyes vigilantly watching traffic with the patience of Father Time himself. I did not recall a bait sign or a frogs-for-sale sign at the end of that particular driveway. Actually, I could not even remember seeing a house. There was only the frog. And now, there was my boundless curiosity to fuel my imagination.

That was well over eight months ago. From time to time, I would have occasion to pass by that frog again. He became an old friend that I could always count on to tell me how far from home I was, or how close. One day, my friend got a new coat. I rode by expecting to see the ole fellow and to my surprise he was Day-Glo orange! As a neon green creature, the frog stuck out from the surroundings, but he was within the same scheme, at least. Now that he had been painted, this eye popping color he seemed to not only command attention but to scream, “Hey, dagnabit, look at me! I will not be ignored!” No one could drive by without noticing the frog. No one could drive by without hearing him. Whatever purpose or intention his owners may have begun with, I think he has his own, and certainly his own story.

As simply an object of curiosity that frog is a piece of powerful art. Whether or not one is inclined to label a piece of roadside sculpture art, one would be hard pressed to seriously, and without prejudice, call the frog anything else. Art is that which peaks curiosity, sends the imagination into overdrive, and causes the observer to ask questions. When people classify anything as art on the basis of whether they like the thing or not, they inadvertently limit their exposure to that which falls within the narrow parameters of their own taste. Art has a purpose, a reason, and a function. What those may be will invariably fluctuate from one perspective to the next, but that only serves to solidify that object’s classification of art.

When we think of purpose, we often think of relevance. While the two are not one and the same, often we can use one to define the other. Since we can do that, we do

not necessarily need both at once. I feel that the relevance of the frog supersedes whatever original purpose there may have been. The frog’s significance to this area imparts an importance to the piece regardless of any intent or artistic inspiration. People see this frog and I doubt many know the true story of where he came from or how he came to live on that particular driveway. But the curiosity is there, the appreciation is there, and the wonder is alive and thriving. Any relevance, even relevance born in ignorance of any truth, is purpose. Would the entire community crumble if the frog found a new home? I would say not. Would the surrounding area notice that their eccentric old friend is missing? I certainly believe so.

I cannot be the only person to find such a curiosity in a new locale. I think the reason we find these particular objects or places to be initially and continually interesting is that they become a foothold in our new world. They are a preliminary connection to the unfamiliar, and the foreign, and are a security blanket all our own that serves to ease the transition to this strange new home. After all, with time everything and every place will become common, but that comfort has to begin somewhere. So with hyper vigilance, we pay attention and we watch, we ponder and we analyze, and then we attempt to turn the strange and weird into a new frame of reference. We use our growing knowledge base to explore this different environment until we, too, are just another resident of whatever “Port Huron” in which we happen to find ourselves.

So be on the look out for this strange fellow poised at the end of some random driveway the next time you find yourself driving, or riding, on Gratiot Avenue. I do not know how long he has been there, and I do not know how long he will continue to live there. All I know for sure is that if you fail to notice him or cannot hear him shouting as you pass him by, your life is way too fast. I encourage you to slow down and enjoy the artful world all around you.



THE TALE OF THE NEWCOMER AND THE FROG

Gerald Crowe

Essay

Time with grandparents should be treasured. There are so many great memories to be made and lessons to be learned from grandparents that should not be taken for granted. I am very grateful to say that I had grandparents that were always there for my sisters and I, like a second set of parents. Some of the greatest memories I have with my grandparents are from the camping trips they took me on. My grandma and grandpa taught me the importance of friends and family and how to appreciate them through the beauty of the outdoors by taking me camping

Camping with my grandparents was always fun; it was their way of ripping my sisters and I away from the dramatic lives we lived. My sisters and I could act like the children that we were, and for a few days, we did not have a care in the world. Every weekend during the summer, my grandparents would take my sisters and me camping with them. We camped at a different campground every weekend. My sisters and I became familiar with the different campgrounds and campers throughout the years of scheduled trips. My grandparents were part of a camping club with members from the Marine City and Algonac areas. I saw the same friendly faces every weekend, all summer long. My grandparents had known their friends in the camping club since they were high school; it was not long before I became friends with the club members and their grandchildren. I always knew that there would be kids to play and explore with, and as long as I used the buddy system, my grandparents would let me venture out to explore the grounds. It was exciting to see the same children at most of the campgrounds. Even if I didn't see any children that I knew, I always had my two sisters and three cousins.

Every camping trip was an adventure. The first thing I always did, as soon as we would get to the campsite, was gather up as many kids as I could find and head toward the woods to look for a trail. The trails were always faint but visible by the mountain bikes that would cut the path just wide enough for a bike tire. The packed dirt terrain was rough; some parts of the trails looked as if I could slide right off the edge. The tall trees and thick bushes, lush and emerald green, gave the trails a cooling cover from the hot summer sun. As long as I was with the friends I had made or my sisters and cousins in the darkened woods, I was never scared. No matter who I was with, I could lose myself in such deep thought of pretending I was Indiana Jones on some crazy adventure searching for the Holy Grail in

a dense jungle and be out on the trails for hours. I would pretend the chirping and squawking from the birds rustling in the trees above were the vibrant colored exotic birds found in the jungles of Brazil; sometimes, I would pretend the noises from the birds were monkeys swinging in the trees. The fallen sticks and branches in the brush always had some sort of use; they were tools, or if strong enough, they were put together as an attempt at a fort. That large wooded area where I played on the trails was the best place for me to open up my imagination and let it run wild.

When the sun began to set, I always knew that it was time to head back to the camper where my grandparents would be sitting with their friends around the warm and smoky campfire. I would grab a chair and sit next to Bernie, a great friend of my grandparents who always brought his guitar on campouts. Bernie sang different songs from the 1950's by artists like Willie Nelson, Buddy Holly, Jonny Cash, including my favorite, Elvis Presley. Although Bernie's raspy, quivering voice sounded nothing like the real deal, he made every attempt at any song request thrown at him and sang every song with his soul. I loved to sing along with him while I cooked my salty hot dogs and burned my sweet and sticky marshmallows to an unrecognizable crisp over the bonfire. As Bernie sang friendly tunes, the club members chatted with each other about their week at work, how big their grandchildren were getting, or how nice it was to have such beautiful weather for the campout. It was great to see such a large group of friends get together with their families and sit around one campfire.

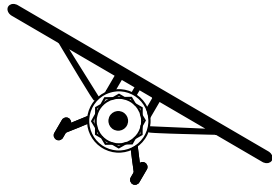
Even though my grandparents sold their camper when I was 14 years old, and had put an end to their camping adventures, their love of the outdoors lives in me. I have introduced my children to the joys of camping, and to see them play and carry on just like I used to, brings me great joy. As I carry on the camping tradition with my friends and family, I will always remember how great it was to spend every weekend of the summer camping with my grandparents. I could let my imagination run wild in the cool wooded trails, and I would have fun with friends and family who might only been seen during the summer weekends. The experiences with my grandparents taught me how camping, even by being outdoors, can bring family and friends closer together and the importance of having something that so many can enjoy.



TIME WITH MY GRANDPARENTS

Synthia Clemons

Merit—Essay



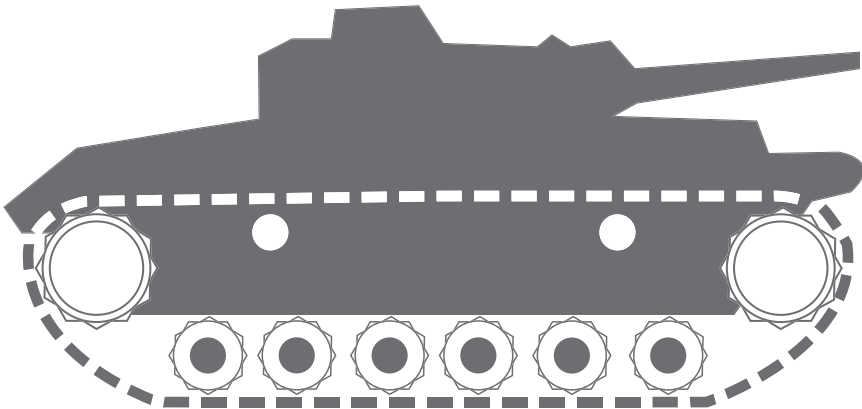
Have you ever witnessed a car accident?
Heard the sound of shattering glass?
Smelled the nauseous odor of burnt rubber?
People screaming for help, trapped like a murderer's victims?
Have you ever tried to pry a fused door,
As if you were the Jaws of Life?
Their cries, frantic but fading with time,
Perhaps from hemorrhaging.
Sudden silence, utter stillness,
Like prey begging not to be seen.Flashing lights, blue and red,
The annoying sirens of hope have arrived.
Nothing is left but to step back,
Pray for safety like the saint and sinner.
Just waiting, praying, hoping.



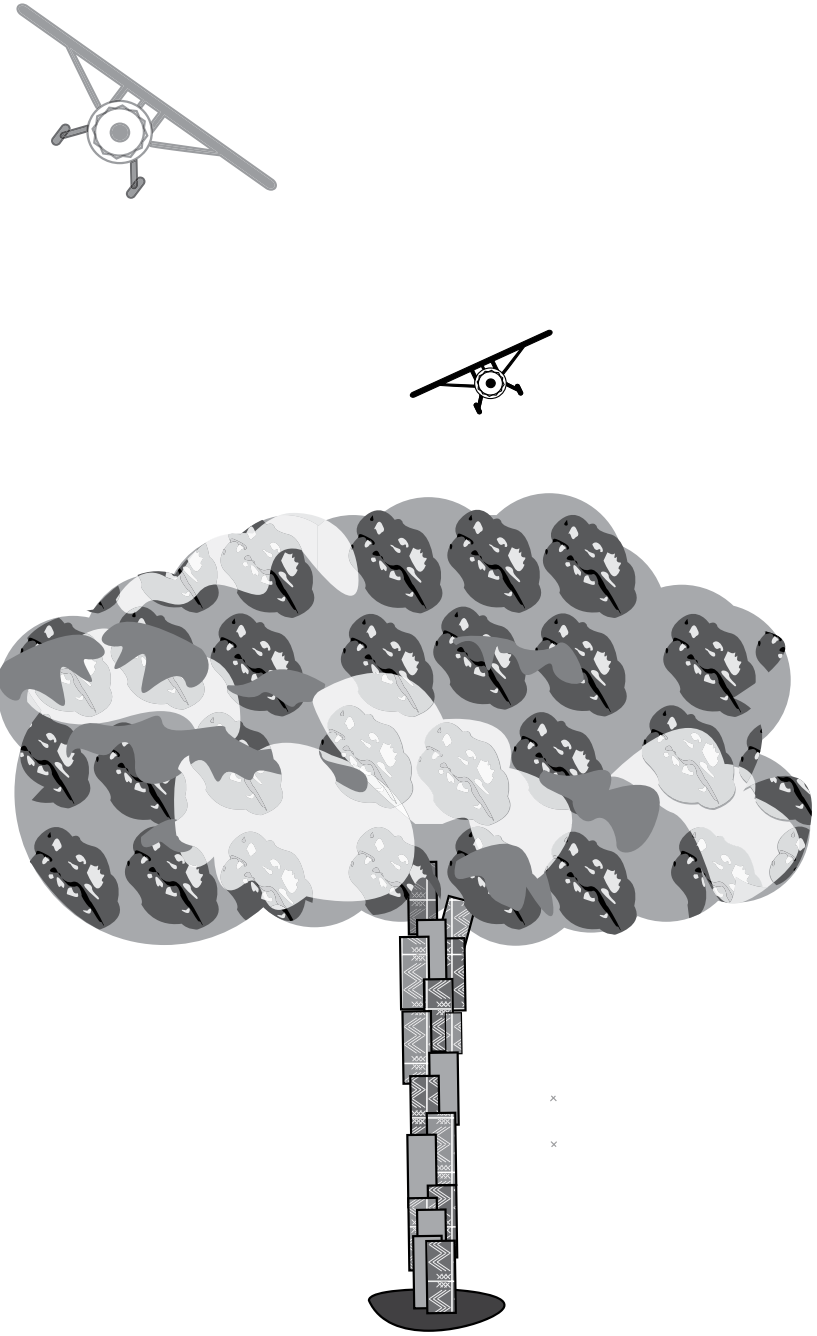
FEAR

David Bercel

Merit—Poetry



A tree vacant of leaves,
Held up by a bright yellow pot,
Contrasting next to the faded brown building.
Not your ordinary tree,
It had bark, and branches,
But unique in a strange way.
Blossoms of chewed up gum replaced the position of leaves
The pot was placed in the center of the village
The decoration for the hot spot
Like a water fountain that children throw pennies in,
A mascot for the neighborhood, Mr. R's,
A notorious ice cream store in the small town.
If you could gather up a quarter, you could by a cone,
But the main attraction was not the delectable ice-cream flavors,
Rather this exclusive gum tree.
If you were chewing gum and wanted to eat ice-cream,
You added to the collection,
Sticking it on a branch,
Just as you stick a stamp to an envelope.
This idea was a trademark of the town.
The branches painted with Trident, Big Red, and Double Bubble gum
The gum tree essentially a metaphor,
Holding the neighborhood together,
a small knit neighborhood all coming together
to proudly place our chomped up gum on the beloved gum tree.



THE GUM TREE

Shelby Stoddard

Merit–Poetry

Kissing her head
I tuck her safely in bed.
Her vibrant pink room is filled
with beautiful princess dolls galore.
Shutting of the lights,
Our smiles fade to frowns.
For I know, nothing can harm her
yet her cries for help are alarming.

Her night-light flickers out casting
dark shadows around her room.
In her mind, her rooms alive,
everything wants to steal her.
Knowing she hates the clown dangling,
I await her pleas for help.

The window is open, causing
curtains to reach for her in every breeze.
She shivers with fear, pulling
her teddy bear tight to her.
The damsel in distress
with her knight in shining armor.

The darkness begins
to swallow them whole.
Overwhelmed with her imagination,
no longer able to see certainty.
She pulls her blanket
of invincibility over her head.
Deep breath in, she exhales
screams that pierce my night.

Three a.m. is neither late nor early
Nothing moves now with the room lit
Merely in my arms for a second,
we safely venture together
into dreamland.



SLEEP

Katie Flenna

Merit–Poetry

I turn, moaning,
And groaning,
Another morning.

I can hear my daughter,
Throwing blocks,
Without worry or fear of pity.
Then she cries.

Every day is this,
I wake,
She cries,
Repeat.

The bed creaks as I get up,
Kicking the cat off the bare mattress.
My mother in the next room,
Her mother in the next room,
I just want to stay in my room.

A good mother wouldn't leave the filth,
I change my daughter,
My burden,
And get dressed for work.

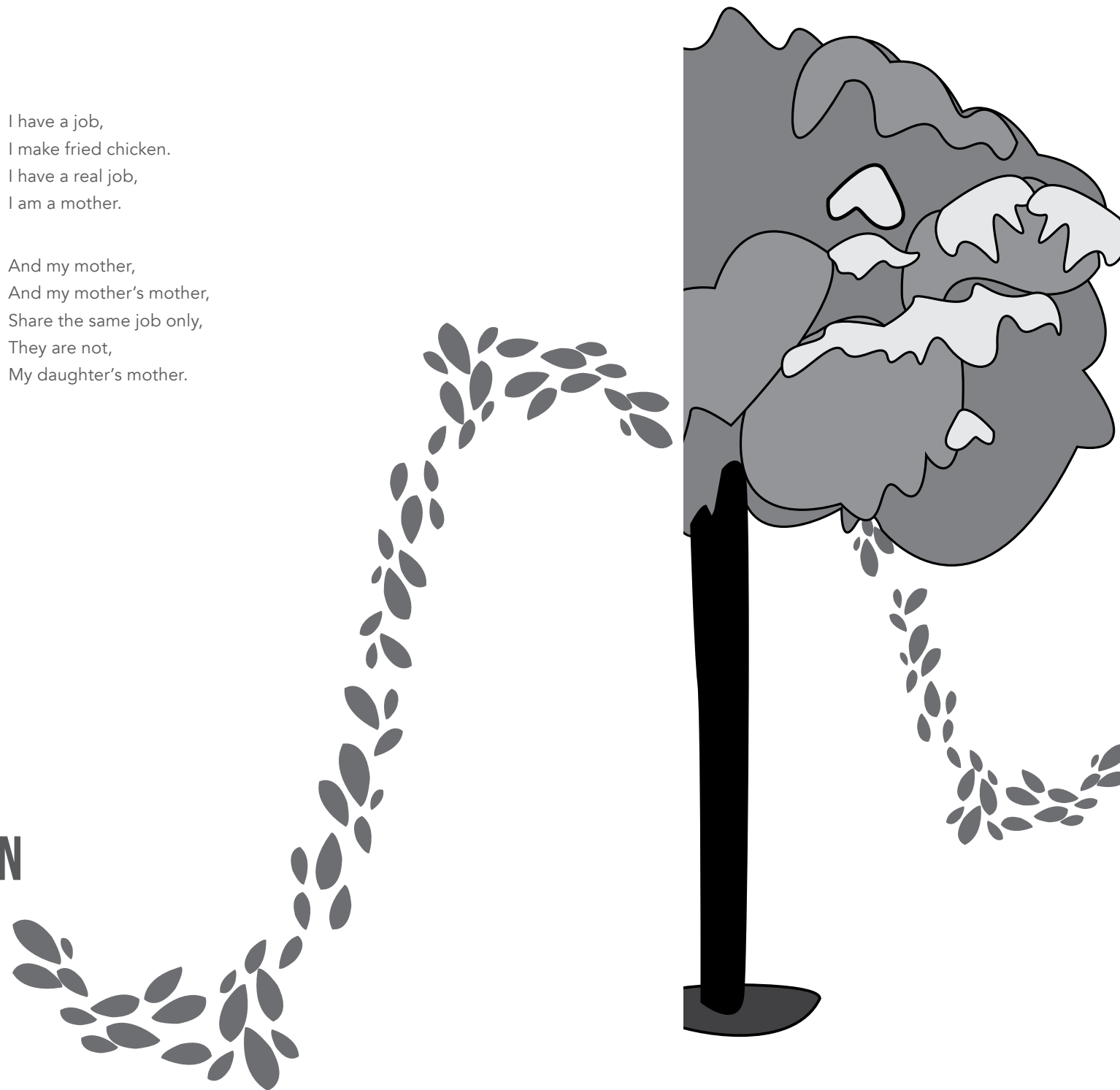
I have a job,
I make fried chicken.
I have a real job,
I am a mother.

And my mother,
And my mother's mother,
Share the same job only,
They are not,
My daughter's mother.

THE BURDENED WOMAN

Lindsey Gofton

Merit—Poetry



Looking out of my kitchen window
I can see in the distance,
Three trees that seemed to go on forever.

My sister and I playing "House"
Until my Mother's whistle for dinner.
Those long days feeding and rocking the babies
Under the thick branches of the trees.

We would climb a mile,
To pick the flowers from the enormous branches
And put them in our baby's hair.
The petals looked so exotic
Like something seen in the movies.

The trees served as our entertainment place
As we raced our dirt bikes and four-wheelers
Through their thick, tall branches
And their hard, bumpy roots.

Sometimes if I was angry, instead of running away,
The three trees stood as my sweet escape.
The place of little movement, no people and no chaos
Was simply just beauty at its finest.
Like the Great Lakes on the horizon,
The three trees were never ending.

THE THREE TREES

Brittany Hoist

Merit—Poetry

A modest tree in our front yard only a few years old
Which is just a hunk of wood to some, but to us a meeting place
A universal sign in the neighborhood
The very spot where these neighbor girls, became like sisters
It was rotted in a spot; if you got to close bugs would rupture out like lava
Holding our hand as we scaled to the top
A contest of who could climb to the peak
A shield to catch us, if we fell from the top.
Always there to catch us when we fall
When the leaves were painted red, orange, and yellow
Slowly descending to the ground
We would meet here to catch the bus
We would meet there to play tag after school
We would rake up the leafs into a sea of colors
Then jump into them like frogs into a puddle
When the was bare, we met to build snowmen together
The tree, supplying us with snowman arms
When green was showered on the tree
We met there for a shaded spot to catch up with each other
Our names are engraved forever in that faithful oak.
I hope the new residents adore that tree,
That they create memories and friends under the branches.
I drive by our old house time by time,
The tree still stands strong in the yard.
We were so adolescent and the tree was a sky scraper,
Scratching the clouds with its branches.
But now, it looks miniscule,
The roots similar to us, all coming from different places,
Then coming together into one place.
And like that tree, we have grown older,
Have been through storms and hardships.
All have gone our own way,
Like the branches that have grown few and far apart.
It has been years since we have met at that tree,
But when we visit our neighborhood friends,
Memories made under that faithful oak are remembered.

THE TREE

Shelby Stoddard

Merit—Poetry

The trees rustled softly as the wind blew,
making the graveyard sound as though
the spirits of all those interred there were
warning those who were still alive to stay away, for there was
danger there. Along with that wind came a slight chill, highly
uncommon for late August in that region of Illinois.

The unusual weather and spooky sensation didn’t
scare off any potential visitors, though. In fact, Juliet thought it
was the perfect night to invite her boyfriend out on a midnight
picnic. She wanted to make Romeo’s last night in town special,
before he headed off to college and forgot all about her and
Verona High School.

She’d be damned if she let him forget about her. It
wasn’t an option she was willing to entertain.

“This dinner is delicious, Baby. You were right about
your family’s old plot being the most romantic spot in town,”
Romeo said through a mouthful of sandwich, breaking through
Juliet’s thoughts. Most boys would look like pigs if they did
that, but Juliet thought he was cute even when he talked with
his mouth full. God, she was so in love with this boy. For a
second, she considered not going through with her big plans
and just cuddling up with Romeo for the rest of the night (or
at least until curfew), but she ultimately decided that the only
way to make Romeo hers forever was to keep going along with
them.

“Thanks, Babel! Have you tried the wine yet? My
parents hid this bottle in a different spot than usual, so it’s
got to be extra good,” she replied, holding up the silver flask
she’d poured it in and shaking it back and forth a little. She
had to make sure it was mixed just right....

Romeo held out his red plastic cup. “Your parents
are so fucking crazy. I’m amazed they were even home
long enough to think of that. Like hiding the bottle is really
gonna stop you if you’re determined to find it—thanks,
Jules,” he sidelined after she filled his cup about three-
quarters of the way full. “Your intensity is one of the things I
love most about you.”

RUN, BABY, RUN

Jennifer Noble

Merit—Short Story

“That’s so sweet, Ro. God, isn’t it cold out tonight?”
Juliet watched Romeo’s throat work as he started to swallow
his wine, making sure he’d downed a decent portion of his
drink before feigning a couple shivers to really sell her last
remark.

“Oh, Baby, are you freezing? Here, take my jacket,”
Romeo fell for her nearly convulsive ‘shivers’ and attempted
to take off his letterman jacket, only to discover that his arms
wouldn’t move for him. “Shit, I can’t feel my arms anymore!
Call 911!”

“No, I don’t think I’m gonna do that, Sweetie,” Juliet
sing-songed, an insane glint in her bright green eyes.

“Wh-why not?” Romeo’s head was starting to feel
fuzzy, almost like that time when he challenged Tybalt to
a shotgunning match and drank him under the table. That
served Jules’ idiot cousin right, thinking he could get her to
break up with Romeo because of some stupid grudge their
families had. He and Juliet were meant to be, he just knew.
They could totally handle him leaving for college. That’s what
Skype was invented for—well, one of the things Skype was
invented for. He had a secret hope that Juliet’s face wouldn’t
be the only part of her he saw online.

“Because now I have you right where I want you,” she
smirked, drawing out the vowel in “right” to almost comical
levels. “Ro, you know I love you, right?”

“Of course I do, Baby. Anyone with half a brain
could see that. That poem you wrote to ask me to prom
was something no one will ever be able to top.” Romeo was
starting to panic. He knew Juliet had problems when they
were kids, always accidentally strangling baby birds when she
tried to hold them and throwing massive, long-lasting temper
tantrums when her parents went on yet another business trip,
but she’d gone to therapy; she was better now. Or at least, he
thought she was. “I love you too, Jules.” Telling her he loved
her was the surefire way to make her smile.

“Just what I wanted to hear. And you also know I can’t live
without you?” Juliet was smiling after Romeo’s comment, but

it wasn't her usual lopsided, almost childish grin. This smile was large, predatory, with her teeth showing and shining almost as white as the grave markers surrounding them.

"Same here, baby, same here. That's why you've really gotta call 911 before something bad happens. I can't feel my legs any more, either." What the hell was Juliet pulling out of the picnic basket?

"Nothing's gonna happen because of that wine, Ro, I promise. I only put enough in to keep you calm." Juliet turned back to face Romeo, and in the moonlight, he saw a sickeningly long steak knife glint.

"Enough of what?" Oh God, now nausea was setting in. Romeo felt like his life was suddenly turning into a terrible horror movie, and he wasn't sure whether he was going to be the victim or the hero.

Juliet ignored his question. "I'm glad we're on the same page, Babe. Now, if we really love each other and we can't live without each other, how are we going to handle you going all the way across state to Mantua U in the fall?"

"We're gonna Skype and talk on the phone at least every other day! Didn't we decide that? Jules, Juliet, please put down the knife, Baby. You're scaring me." Romeo was babbling with his nerves. If he could just get her to put down the knife, everything would be okay. Maybe she just wanted it out in case—he didn't know why. Suddenly, his best friend Ben's words flashed across his brain: *Your girlfriend is fucking psycho, dude*. Had Ben meant that literally? Romeo had thought Ben was just jealous of his and Juliet's relationship at the time, seeing as he was terminally single, but now that phrase sounded far more ominous.

"That's not the same as actually being together, Ro. I can't handle you being away from me for two whole years until I graduate too. I'm not going to let it happen," Juliet's voice was lower than usual, almost feral in its tone. She had made up her mind, and there was no turning back from the plan at this point. She knew she was doing the right thing and that Romeo would understand. He always understood

her, even when she felt like she was losing her grip. He was the one constant person in her life, the only person who was always there for her. Not even her parents were that reliable. She couldn't let him leave.

"Then what're you gonna do?" Romeo couldn't help but slur his words at this point. He just wanted to let go and hopefully wake up back in the real world because this couldn't be happening. He closed his eyes and counted to five quickly in his mind, praying that he would open them to find his bedroom surrounding him and a sweet "good night" text from Juliet on his phone. Unfortunately, he had no such luck.

"I'm going to ensure we never have to be apart."
Juliet raised the knife to chest level, the point directly across from Romeo's rib cage.

"Jul—" Romeo's sentence was cut off by Juliet ramming the knife into his heart. He screamed, a terrified, unbroken sound that echoed through the graveyard. "Why?" he choked while she pulled it back out, leaving him to bleed out on the white marble steps of her family's ancestral monument. His breathing lurched and rattled like the engine of his beater.

"Don't you see, Babe? Now we'll always be together in the afterlife. No one can separate us now," she replied calmly, a look of almost fanatic bliss on her face. "Wait for me when you get wherever you're going. I love you." She saw the last spark of life fade out of Romeo's deep brown eyes. Once she knew he wasn't in pain any more, she took the knife and stabbed herself in the heart as well, falling on top of Romeo's chest as she had done so many times in the past when they were embracing and holding back a scream of her own. Their blood pooled and ran down the steps, forming a crooked scarlet heart at the bottom. The outline of it would never fully fade, even after their families paid to have the tomb professionally cleaned.

The pounding of my feet ran counterpoint to the manic drumming in my head. Three weeks had passed since my eighteenth birthday, when the sound first started. I'd spent every day since then wondering if I'd gone mad and doing everything in my power to try to stop or at least soften the sound. Unfortunately, today the noise was at its loudest yet, which made me decide to escape to the churchyard. Except for the hourly ringing of the bells in the steeple, it was the quietest place in the village, so I was hoping that either the church bells would be loud enough to overpower my mental drumbeat or the Mother would hear my prayers and grant me relief. What actually happened, though, was more than I ever expected.

I had found an isolated ring of trees where I could start my prayers when I heard footfalls behind me. Somehow I could hear those clearly, even though I had barely managed to hear my mother talking to me at breakfast that morning from across our narrow plank table.

"I know exactly how to treat what's ailing you, my dear," came a voice from above me. But for the fact it was male, I would have thought the Mother herself was answering me from the heavens.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, sir," I replied, turning to look up at him. He was unfamiliar, which struck me as odd—our village was small, and new people didn't come around often. Still, I wasn't about to admit my insanity to a stranger, even one who showed up right when I needed him most and looked like he honestly cared about my wellbeing.

"Oh, I'm sorry. There must be another girl hearing an incessant beating in her head," he said. The sass in his tone could not have been more tangible if it was physically hitting me, which I did not expect from such an old, small man. He looked as though he would blow right away if the wind caught him too hard, though he did have an almost unnatural spark in his eye.

"How do you know about that?" I demanded.

"It's apparent to someone who knows what he's looking for. Now, would you like to put an end to your troubles or would you rather go mad? You don't have much time left before that happens, you know."

To this day I would not be able to say exactly why, but I believed this man would be able to help me. He had appeared at the perfect time, after all, and he was dressed in a priest's warm robes, though I had never seen him at the weekly services. I decided to trust him.

"Please, tell me what I need to do, sir."

"You will be able to put a stop to your problem if you reach the river Floren by sunset tonight. Any later, and you will have missed your chance for good."

That conversation had been about an hour after midday, and I had spent the two since running for the river as fast as I could manage. I had only slightly over an hour left of sunlight and was just beginning to see the signs that the river was close. I summoned up all the strength I had left and continued on.

Finally, I saw the water glistening in the last vestiges of sunlight. When I fully entered the clearing, I looked all about myself, checking for other people or some item that looked promising. After looking through the entire hollow twice and seeing no people and nothing labeled, "This Will End the Drumming, Isla, Use Me," or suchlike, I decided that there was nothing left for me but to dive into the water, much as I didn't want to. I had never been the greatest swimmer, and the Floren's current was the strongest in the country. Even more worrying were the legends about the river, which said that bad luck would befall anyone who disturbed it, but I decided that there could be nothing worse than what was already happening to me, especially if I was certain to go mad if I couldn't end this drumming.

RUN, BABY, RUN (CONTINUED)

Jennifer Noble

Merit–Short Story

RUN TO THE RIVER

Jennifer Noble

Merit – Short Story

Screwing up my courage, I took a few steps back and launched myself toward the river. When I was fully underwater, I opened my eyes to see if I could notice anything special about the water. I panicked a little when I realized that there was a fiery red haze around me, but then I realized that that was my hair swirling in front of my face. Once my lungs were about to give out, I resurfaced, shivering from the chill of the water. Not even the pull of the current was enough to cease my drumbeat, though, and I muttered to myself, "Was he lying to me?"

I turned back to the riverbank when I noticed that I wasn't alone in the clearing anymore. A girl who looked to be about my age had just entered, and she was staring at me like I was the Mother herself. I couldn't fault her, though, because this girl was the prettiest I had ever seen, and I was staring just as hard. Her hair couldn't decide if it wanted to be red or gold, so it mixed both, and I was fascinated. We started walking toward each other, never once breaking eye contact once it was established, her green eyes meeting my blue. The pounding in my head intensified as I got closer.

"They told me I would be able to end my problem if I came here," she said dazedly.

"I heard the same. I've been hearing a drumming noise in my head ever since I turned eighteen, and I don't know why." That was more than I'd meant to tell the girl. Her eyes widened as she heard, and for a second I thought she was going to faint.

"So have I. My nurse told me it was a sign, that it happened to all the girls in my family when they were ready to be wed. She didn't mention that it would happen to another person, too."

I could think of only one way to test her statement. "Just hold very still." I leaned in, hoping that the girl wouldn't run away when she figured out what I was doing. The drumming reached a crescendo, becoming so loud that

I almost lost my focus, but I managed to overcome it and touch my lips to the girl's.

The drumming ceased instantly, causing both of us to stagger into each other. I stepped back but didn't fully let go of the girl, bracing my hands on her elbows. I had the feeling that if I let her go too far, the drumming would return.

“...I suppose I should introduce myself,” said she. “I’m Ava, and I have the strangest feeling that we’re going to be spending a lot of time together in the future.” The smile that lit up her face was even brighter than the sunset reflecting off the river, if that was possible.

"I'm Isla, and I'm not opposed to that in the slightest." I linked my left arm in her right, and gestured ahead with my other, matching her smile with one of my own. "Care to lead us home?"

My friend Natalie (Nat) and I stand by a light blue wall that's covered in pictures of tattoos. After dragging me around the place to look at all the pictures, she finally stopped by a corner. I feel awkward standing there, with my hands in the pockets of my grey jacket, feeling the folded up piece of paper I brought with me. Chewing on the corner of my mouth, I take my hands out of my pockets. I don't really know what to do with them, so I cross them over my chest and then bring one of my hands up to play with my hair while looking down.

"Hey, Sarah, what about this one?"

I look up from the wooden floor to the wall. Nat points to a tattoo of a grey wolf curled over a crescent moon.

"Looks kind of simple."

"Pfft, maybe I like simple. I could get it on my ankle."

"I thought you were getting angel wings on your back?"

"That can be my third one," Nat grins. She turns to face me, with her back against the wall and her arms crossed over her chest. "So, are you actually going to let him finish yours? Do I have to seal the exits?"

"I could still escape through a window if I wanted, but...uh...no. I'm going to finish this."

"Tired of having a half-finished tattoo? Not that I'd be surprised if you never got it finished. You have the world's worst habit of not finishing things, you know."

"You make it sound like it's weird to *not* go looking for pain," I defend, but I know she's right. There are a number of half drawn in sketch books with unfinished drawings littered around my room to back Nat's claim up. It's another reason why I really want to go through with this. I want to finish *something*, to see something through until the end rather than just putting it off to the side to never be touched again.

"I *told* you not to get it on that spot. If you didn't want it to be super painful, then you should have listened to me and got it on a meatier spot, like your upper arm." She reaches out to pinch my skin over the fabric of my jacket.

"See, look at all this flesh." She pulls at my skin and wiggles her hand as if to make a point of how much meat I have on my upper arm.

"That would defeat the purpose of getting it," I sigh in frustration, as I swat her hand away. I

can't wait until this is over and done with. Not only will I have my tattoo, but I won't have to listen to Nat telling me where I should have gotten it.

"Alright, just make sure you don't run off. You know that was embarrassing for me too—and you just left me behind." She sticks her bottom lip out. Ever the dramatic.

I cover her mouth with my hand. "Don't pout. I waited for you in the car."

Nat tries to say something,
but it comes out muffled so I remove
my hand.

"What?"

"I was warning you that I bite."

"You're so gross."

"Coming from you, that's even more of an insult." Nat points to my hand. "Considering what you're into."

"There's nothing wrong with what I'm into. Lots of people are into it. They even have books about it."

Nat waves me off. "They have books about everything, even gross stuff."

It's at that point that a man with long wavy brown hair pulled back into a ponytail comes up to us. His arms are covered in tattoos, and I can't

RUN TO THE RIVER (CONTINUED)

Jennifer Noble

Merit – Short Story

TATTOO

Ali Carr

Merit – Short Story

help but stare at his tattoo sleeve that disappears up into his T-shirt. It’s the same man who started my tattoo the last time we came. Eric, I believe is his name.

“So, do you know what you want yet?”

“Hmm, I’m still considering, but my friend here is set,” Nat says while giving my back a pat. “She’s still a little nervous, so I’ll stick with her.”

The man smiles at me. “I’m surprised you came back. You left in a hurry last time. You practically threw the money at me and ran out the door.”

My cheeks feel warm at the reminder. I didn’t actually throw money at him or run out of the door, but I had left in a hurry. Getting the tattoo had hurt more than I thought it would. He had stopped halfway through the tattoo to give both of us a break, but just as he was about to start up again, I had stood up and told him I was done, stuttering and stumbling over my words as I paid him and left.

I decide to try and laugh my embarrassment off, though my face still feels a little red. “Let’s uh, not talk about that.”

“At least she came back. Finally got tired of her half tat.”

We were led to a small square room that was full of pictures of the man’s work as well as trophies he had won for his skills. The man, whose name I believe is Eric, had me sit in a comfortable black chair.

“Alright, hold your hand out.”

I hold out my left hand out for him to look at, while digging the picture of what I want out of my pocket to give to him. As he gets ready, I look down at the palm of my hand, at my unfinished tattoo. Idly, I wonder if sweat will be a problem, but it’s just a passing thought. The tattoo is of a Chilean rose tarantula, made to look as if it’s standing on my palm, facing me. Just looking at it takes me back to the day where I got to hold one for the first time.

“Ugh, I feel like shuddering already,” Nat states while also looking down at my hand. She’s sitting on an extra chair in the corner. There’s a shelf of trophies behind her and a desk that’s covered in papers and binders to her left.

“I don’t get many girls who want spider tattoos, especially one where it looks like the spider is standing on your palm.”

“She must not want people to shake her hand anymore,” Nat says cheerfully, leaning back in her chair, crossing her legs, and swinging her foot.

“I shake with my right hand,” I mention offhandedly, only half paying attention to the conversation.

“It’s to commemorate her true love,” Nat puts her hands together and fakes a swoon, sighing dreamily and tilting her head back.

“You’re in too good of a mood. Are you really that happy to see me about to pass out from pain? Once he gets to the legs on my wrist, I might black out.”

“Hey, I’m actually trying to be a good friend here! I’m trying to distract you from the pain by being funny and awesome. So ungrateful.”

“You ready?” Eric asks as he takes my wrist in one hand and holds the needle up to my hand with the other.

I can hear the sound of the needle buzzing and just nod. As soon as the needle touches my skin I cringe, inhaling sharply while I clench my teeth and grip onto the chair with my free hand.

“Man, you threw me off, now I forgot what I was talking about,” Nat sighs, but this time I ignore her completely.

“My true love,” I grunt.

“Your true love was a spider?”

“She’s weirdly obsessed with them. It creeps me out all the time.” Nat gestures toward the picture, which is of a real tarantula in the palm of my latex covered hand. “That’s my uncle’s spider. I asked him if she could hold it and she got weirdly excited over holding a bug.”

“You call me weird, yet you’re the one who squeals over rodents.”

“Oh, I *know* you’re not referring to my two hamsters. They’re *adorable* and you know it.”

Eric chuckled and threw out, “I have a snake.”

Nat immediately makes a face. “...Ew.”

“Snakes are pretty cool, but spiders are better. They’re amazing predators.... They’re pretty smart too....” I stare at Nat, keeping my eyes away from my hand. Eric pauses to wipe at my palm, and I use that moment to take deep breaths.

“I’d offer you my hand to hold, but I’m afraid you might break it. Is the conversation helping, at least?”

“...A little...maybe....”

“You’re like a little kid getting her booboo cleaned. When I was a kid, my dad would read to me while my mom cleaned my cuts and scrapes to distract me from the pain of peroxide.”

She paused, looking thoughtful before adding, “It didn’t work every time, but sometimes it did.”

“Touching.”

Eric pauses to look up at me. “Do you want to take a break?”

I start chewing on the corner of my lip again, considering it.

“No.”

“It’d be sad if she needed one already. You just got started.”

Eric shrugged. “It’s a sensitive spot. The skin’s really thin here. I don’t want her to pass out in the chair.”

“Ha, have you ever had anyone actually do that?”

“One person did, yeah.”

“Really? For a tattoo, or a piercing? Where was it?”

“I’d rather not say,” Eric says as he chuckles.

It was probably somewhere embarrassing, but I can’t focus on it anymore. The pain in my hand keeps getting stronger. I wish I could handle this like Nat, who didn’t look at all affected when she got her tattoo. She didn’t get one on her hand or wrist, but still, she didn’t even *wince*.

The pain isn’t earth shattering, but it’s enough to make my heart start to beat faster. I try to take long, deep breaths to stay calm, but my breathing is becoming harsher, and I can’t think or focus on anything but the pain in my palm.

“Okay, okay, stop, stop, stop,”

I say in a rush, almost hissing the words. Eric immediately stops and begins wiping the ink and blood off my palm.

“Five minute break then?”

“Yeah,” I breathe in relief, shaking my hand a little—I’m not sure why I shake my hand; it doesn’t make it feel better, but I want to do *something* with it, anything to dispel some of the pain.

I almost want to just leave. It would be easy. It’s not like he can force me to stay. Nat would complain and tease me, but she’d get over it.

“So how are you doing? Does it hurt real bad?” Nat asks, scooting closer to me.

“What do you think?”

“Let me see it.” I hold my palm out to her. “Hm. It’s ugly, but impressive. When it’s done, it really will look like you have a spider standing on your palm. It’ll actually be kind of funny to see people react to it. When this is over, I have a few people whose hands I want you to shake.”

TATTOO (CONTINUED)

Ali Carr

Merit – Short Story

“Evil.”

Nat grinned and shrugged, unashamed as she settled back into her chair.

“Just think of what your *mom’s* reaction to it will be. I should go home with you for winter break to see.”

My mom will freak out when she sees my tattoo. She wasn’t too keen on me getting one to begin with and has always thought my fascination with spiders was abnormal. I can imagine her reaction in my head. She’d back up—as she maybe makes some weird, embarrassing sound at the sight of it—bring her hands up and ask me what the hell I was thinking.

...It’s kind of funny.

I look back down at my hand and think about how much I want this. Spiders have always been an interest to me. I draw them, I read about them, I want one, and it would be amazing to be able to study them. I also hope that if I can just finish this one thing, then maybe it’ll be easier to finish other things. If I can just get into the habit of not leaving in the middle....

“Are you ready to start again?”

“Yeah, might as well get it over with.”

“That’s the spirit!” Nat chirps.

Eric starts on my hand again and Nat starts talking about something she doesn’t find creepy, so I decide to tune her out. I keep looking in her general direction while I remember the time I first held her uncle’s tarantula, who was given the name Jared for some reason. I remember how her uncle had used a pen to see if he would even be okay with being picked up, and how I put my hand in his little tank for him to climb on. I had worn latex gloves so my skin wouldn’t get irritated by his hairs. He didn’t really move in my hand and had seemed pretty docile and relaxed, and I remember wondering if it had been due to old age—he had died a couple of months later. I remember being scared when I first went to pick him up, but after seeing how relaxed he was, that fear ebbed away and was replaced by awe. I had always been fascinated with spiders, and when I first saw tarantulas on a documentary as a kid, I thought they were the coolest things.

I replayed the memory of watching the documentary in my head, though it didn’t block out the pain, it gave me something else to focus on, which made it a little bit easier.

“And finished.”

I sighed in relief. I brought my hand up after he wiped at it. It still

hurt—*badly*—but it looked just like Jared was in my hand. I felt a swell of pride in myself as I looked at it, as well as a bit of nostalgia.

“Should we leave you two alone?” Nat jokes, giggling.

“Nothing wrong with admiring art,” I defend, though my tone is playful. I feel giddy and good.

I couldn’t wait to visit my mom over break and shake her hand.

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There she was again, the girl with the tattoo on her foot, sitting across the library. I don’t know enough Latin to know what it says, but I can assume that it’s nothing particularly deep. It probably says something like love is strength or some similar feel good nonsense. The point isn’t that she has a tattoo, and it doesn’t matter what it says. What matters is that there she is again. Every day for the entire semester, I’ve sat here and she’s sat there, that tattoo not always being visible but always being present. I want to know what it says so badly. I should go ask her; that’s simple enough right? I could just go ask the gorgeous girl across the library about her tattoo. I should just go ask that angel stranded on Earth what the scrawl on her foot means. It’ll be finals week next week and there’s no guarantee she’ll ever walk back into this library again. If I’m going to ask, I need to do it now.

I stand. She stands at almost the same moment. We make eye contact. My face flushes, hers does not. I exhale through my nose, steeling myself for the impending horror that will be conversing with this great beauty that is the Tattooed Girl of Temperance Library. There is a little shakiness in my first step. Even some in my second step as well. Hers are careful and graceful as if guided by a power greater than that which I possess. In two steps, we’re almost face to face. Inches now separate us.

A smile creeps onto her face, slowly drawing up the corners of her ruby lips and revealing her ivory teeth. Like the tinkling of glass, the words, “I love you,” fall lightly into the air between us. I open my mouth to release some of the raging torrent within my chest, but all I can manage is a smile and a nervous laugh. Oh gods, I’ve blown it. The perfect opportunity to talk to the greatest enigma in my life and my brain fails me. “On my foot, my tattoo, it says, ‘I love you’.”

Acknowledgement floods my face and then disappointment for what momentarily could have been. “I’ve

been sitting in the same spot every day, hoping you would ask me what it said.” She was waiting for me? To ask her? All the wasted time! “I do have a few other things I’d like to talk to you about,” a pause to draw breath and collect my facilities for the most important thing I’ve said in ages, “Would you care for a cup of coffee? Perhaps something to eat?” She says yes. My heart leaps. As we turn towards the door, our hands bump. Our fingers nervously flit around one another, unsure of what to do, what we can do, what we will do. One at a time, they interlock as we make our way out into the street. As we walk, I notice another tattoo on her wrist, this one a broken heart. Perhaps I’ll ask about that one over a different cup of coffee.

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TATTOO (CONTINUED)

Ali Carr

Merit – Short Story

THE TATTOO

Thomas Hickman

Merit – Short Story



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